TERROR AND THE
SUBLIME IN ART AND
CRITICAL THEORY

FROM AUSCHWITZ TO HIROSHIMA

TO SEPTEMBER 11

Gene Ray

Terror and the Sublime in Art and Critical Theory

Studies in European Culture and History

edited by

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From Auschwitz to Hiroshima to September 11

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For John Knoblock, whose teaching was a question
of love no less than a love of the question

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Preface

This book offers neither the handrail of systematic exposition nor the readerly reassurances of unified voice, tone, and address. If trauma, terror, and the sublime are its recurrent figures, the treatments offered are fragmentary and situated, as befits the humbled production of knowledge. If the essays constelled here betray a story that goes beyond thematics to touch the problem of form, then that story is a reflection of urgent times. As the hit of a traumatic "event" reverberates through global public space, exposing a world system in crisis and its over-revved war machine, academic writing is dragged kicking from the ruins of its ivory towers. If these essays begin in the patient and sanctioned modus of close reading, they end by rejecting altogether the conventionalized and policed distinctions between academic and political textual genres. The constative gives way to the performative, the exegesis of work and image yields to urgent critique, the labor of insight leaps over into intervention and refuses to be anything else. These essays register not merely the very different venues and occasions for which they were written but, more tellingly, the pressured conditions under which texts can be written and published at all today: sentences that fail to register the state of emergency simply fail.

Globalization has begotten cosmopoliticization, and history is on the move again, the furies just behind it. We don't know where this is going, but it has begun. We are, as the Germans say, *mittendrin*: "in the middle of it," entangled and placed in the new global immanence. If art and politics have always been locked together in the dialectic of culture and barbarism, that dialectic cannot be closed off from the hit of rupturing occurrence. Whether catastrophic or messianic, "events" are necessarily traumatic. If "events" could be merely reduced or assimilated to the given order of things, then they would not be "events." But the structural belatedness of trauma is such that we will not be able to know, before choosing and acting, which kind of "event" has arrived (or is in the process of arriving). Between the openness or the closure of fear with which we can meet it lies the space of what Derrida calls "impossible" decision.

The period beginning now will test our practices and commitments. Today, in all the zones of relative autonomy, the promise of happiness plays

aikido with the recuperative weight of the culture industry. We will see if this suffices or can even be sustained. Between the possible and the impossible, to keep pressure on the given world without conceding the good universal or accepting the violation of any singularity or nonidentical: the outlines and first moves of such a cultural ethics or politics have been thought for us—by Adorno, Derrida, and others—in the desolated aftermath of Auschwitz and Hiroshima. We will have our chance to reach for an "other" politics, across the old borders, in new acts of thinking and new forms and models of radical collaboration. The moments marked in these essays are neither a completion nor the last word. They are a bracing, as much as a reaching, for what is coming.

Acknowledgments

No one writes alone: it is unnecessary to say it. My proper name on the title page is the conventional fiction, no more or less. Protocol calls here for a declaration of debt that falls short of the radical dispersal of authorship that thinking and writing nevertheless enact. The critique of originality would in truth spare nothing: to question, too insistently, the conditions of possibility of even the slightest leap of thought would be so humbling as to be tactless. To think and write is to do so with others, and back at the beginnings, wherever those may be if they are at all, things were never any different.

What one owes to a partner is more existential than any mere reckoning can express. My wife Gaby lived with this book and, in the strongest way, made its writing possible: it belongs to her as much as it does to me.

Thomas Pepper is immanent in every one of these essays: ten years ago he generously and carefully led me to and into the category of the sublime, thereby giving me the hard gift of a name for my obsession. For what I've done with it after that, he can't be blamed. I only hope, with due fear and trembling, that I haven't failed him.

Friends and fellow latecomers have read these essays in draft form. Their sharp insights, critical comments, and helpful suggestions have been invaluable. I am especially grateful to Rasheed Araeen, Guy Brett, Christine Mehring, Stephen Miles, Ziauddin Sardar, and Ursula Tax for reading all or major portions of the manuscript. I also thank Lewis Andrews, Barbara Bernstein, Dominic Boyer, Gaye Chan, Josh Cohen, Steven Corcoran, David Garret, Nick Manolukas, Ryuta Nakajima, Joni Spigler, Alfredo Triff, Deborah Waite, Johannes Werner, and Armin Zweite for sharing their time and knowledge. They have all tried to save me; if I've gone wrong just the same, that's not their fault.

This book would not have been possible without the sustaining generosity of the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation: its support of my research in 1996 and 1997 was crucial to the genesis of this project, and its continued support enabled me to return to Berlin in 2002 and 2003 and complete the text. Thanks also to Anselm Franke and Kunst-Werke Institute for Contemporary Art for hosting my last period of writing in Berlin.

Abbreviations

The following works are cited by the corresponding abbreviations, both in the main text and in the notes. Where a German title is given, page numbers cite first the German, then the English edition.

AT Theodor W. Adorno, *Ästhetische Theorie* in *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 7, ed. Gretel Adorno and Rolf Tiedemann (Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1986); in English as *Aesthetic Theory*, trans. Robert Hullot-Kentor (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997).

CCS Adorno, "Kulturkritik und Gesellschaft," in *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 10.1; "Cultural Criticism and Society," in *Prisms*, trans. Samuel and Shierry Weber (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1981).

CH Walter Benjamin, "Über den Begriff der Geschichte," in *Illuminationen: Ausgewählte Schriften*, vol. 1, ed. Siegfried Unseld (Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1977); "On the Concept of History," trans. Harry Zohn, in *Walter Benjamin: Selected Essays, Volume 4, 1938–40*, ed. Howard Eiland and Michael W. Jennings (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2003).

CJ Immanuel Kant, *Kritik der Urteilskraft*, in *Werkausgabe*, vol. 10, ed. Wilhelm Weischedel (Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1974); *Critique of Judgment*, trans. Werner S. Pluhar (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1987). Citations of this work will also include § number.

CT Adorno, "Engagement," in *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 11; "Commitment," in *Notes to Literature*, vol. 2, trans. Shierry Weber Nicholsen (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992).

FL Jacques Derrida, "Force of Law: The 'Mystical Foundation of Authority'," in *Deconstruction and the Possibility of Justice*, ed. Drucilla Cornell, Michael Rosenfeld, and David Gray Carlson (London: Routledge, 1992).

MM   Adorno, *Minima Moralia: Reflexionen aus dem beschädigten Leben* (Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1951); *Minima Moralia: Reflections from Damaged Life*, trans. E.F.N. Jephcott (London: Verso, 1974).

ND   Adorno, *Negative Dialektik*, in *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 6; *Negative Dialectics*, trans. E.B. Ashton (New York: Continuum, 1995).

OCF   Derrida, *On Cosmopolitanism and Forgiveness*, trans. Mark Dooley and Michael Hughes (London: Routledge, 2001).

TI   Jean-François Lyotard, *The Inhuman: Reflections on Time*, trans. Geoffrey Bennington and Rachel Bowlby (Stanford: University of Stanford Press, 1991).

TUE   Adorno, "Versuch, das Endspiel zu verstehen," in *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 11; "Trying to Understand *Endgame*," in *Notes to Literature*, vol. 1, trans. Shierry Weber Nicholsen (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991).

WTP   Adorno, "Was bedeutet: Aufarbeitung der Vergangenheit," in *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 10.2; "The Meaning of Working Through the Past," in *Critical Models: Interventions and Catchwords*, trans. Henry W. Pickford (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998).

Introduction: The Hit

Hit happens. A rip, a quick cut by a razor. From the outside, something breaks through and in: an intervention into the stabilized form of psychic life. As if by fate or chance: disturbance, disruption—what will be felt as pain, a crisis or breakdown. A punch in the guts, a violation, a horrible, helpless, caught in the grips of. A terror, an after-awe, an anguish of ruination. Defensively: deflection, mis-recognition. *Look, the birds are on fire.* We are forced, overwhelmed, blown away. We hit a wall, crash, are shredded. And we come out on the other side, spilling down, ash and glass. And not even then, but only later, the question: *what the . . . ?* Insistence, return, rehearsal, reenactment. Compulsive repeating: replay, rewind, replay. Mediations and remediations that still veer away. Then, maybe, a reach, a throw. In a potlatch of words and images, something like an approach. Out of which, maybe, a capture, a first remembering–forgetting of representation, the work of emplotment. Then, maybe, testing, reflection, analysis, judgment: a passage back, from the disturbed body to the shared word.

This movement after the hit is what psychoanalytic theory calls mourning. Trauma is a category of damage. It marks the limit of conventionalized, assimilable experience and the vulnerability of the psychic organization to disrupting penetrations from outside. As such, it is a threat to the imaginary integrity of subjectivity. In Jacques Lacan's famous redaction of Freud, a "missed encounter" with the real.[1] Missed, because it cannot yet happen at the time of occurrence: a different temporal regime is in force—that of *Nachträglichkeit*, or aftereffectiveness. Overpowered, lacking the means to confront and interpret the hit as experience, the subject misses the appointment. The missed encounter and its meanings can only be reconstructed in retrospect. This reconstruction and its eventual assimilation as belated experience would then be "truth," but would not be the restoration of a fictional integrity or subjective plenitude. The encounter happens, belatedly, but remains missed. What is assimilated is the miss itself. Trauma, we could say, threatens to disenchant the subject. Mourning would be, precisely, an interminable movement of disenchantment: enlightenment as endless, ever deepening self-critique.

In trauma's aftermath, preferring the comforts of enchantment, we hide, avoid, and cover up the wound. We deny that anything happened. Or we blindly repeat the missing of the encounter, rehearsing its nonoccurrence and calling it back for reenactment again and again. Depending on the strength of our desire for the truth and on the support of our collective milieu, we may, possibly, work and play it through, into words and interpretations that can then in turn be shared, discussed, and criticized. So we refuse our traumas and thereby remain in their power. Or we succumb to their pathos and make a home of melancholy. Or we mourn them and learn to accept that we must now be different. Finally that's what mourning means: accepting the burden of change. Going on, not as before, but differently—with the awareness that in the wake of a disclosure, more, and not less, is demanded of us.

However, history would not merely be the public sum of private traumas. The individual bourgeois subject, who endures trauma and suffers its pain, is itself a product of history: an effect of specific social relations and conditions. By throwing into relief the limits, edges, and structure of this vulnerable subjectivity, trauma forces the issue of subjectivity as such: the subject of history, the problems of historical agency and transformation. If it does not, then mourning is incomplete. Such would be the "untruth" of a psychoanalysis that stops at the level of the individual. (Psychoanalysis: "the last grandly-conceived theorem of bourgeois self-criticism" [MM 113/66].)

When the accumulation of historical trauma reaches critical mass, quantity passes into quality. When that happens, the problems of who we are and how, together, we want to live are starkly exposed. Auschwitz and Hiroshima were this qualitative break or shift. In the wound of these two place-names, the trauma of particular victims and groups condensed and mutated into a general, second-order trauma that desolates the legitimacy of the capitalist world order and ruins the self-flattering myths of Enlightenment that underwrite it. This was, already, our common trauma. The disenchantment it threatens is radical. Knowingly or not, all latecomers are victims by proxy. Where once we saw progress, now, like Walter Benjamin's angel of history, we can recognize the sickening wreckage of shared catastrophe (CH 255/392–3).

This is not to smear or deny important distinctions between subject positions: victim, perpetrator, bystander, collaborator, beneficiary, resister, latecomer (as well as nationality, race and ethnicity, gender, and other bases of elective or imposed identity). Acts of mourning can only begin from within the historical specificity of such positions and the borders between them. But the movement of mourning should not seize up in exaltation of such borders. Such positions all too easily become traps or dead ends for the desire for truth. Beyond the groups that were its targets, the extreme violence of Auschwitz and Hiroshima was aimed at humanity itself: at the proposed

bond of universal solidarity and the shared promise of a global happiness. Not just grouped singularities² were irredeemably gassed and bombed. In the deepest sense, we gassed and bombed ourselves. The passage from the monadic closure of the victim group to the thinking of globalized catastrophe—the differentiated joining of the attacked particular and the attacked universal—would be mourning's humbled movement of reconciliation.

The mourning of this collective trauma, however, is not automatic. No more than is the case in the personal traumas of private life, mourning will not happen on its own. As Freud made clear, only those who desire the truth and are open to change in response to it can be helped by a practice of analysis. Collective mourning is no simple proposition. To desire the truth and be open to change already runs up against the stasis of the systemic given and all of its coercive resources. To mourn collectively would require that the desire for truth be sustained at great cost and across many generations, into a future that is unforeseeable. A resolute will to confront the worst and, bearing and reflecting this knowledge, to change ourselves: this would be nothing less than to reorganize the relations between us. And we would need to perform this collective, "wild" psychoanalysis on ourselves, without the reassuring presence of an empathic witness to our struggles or any godly "Big Other" who, outside of our predicament, can be "assumed to know" the truth we seek. (And who are "we"? We are the global heirs of the European Enlightenment and its dialectic: its promise of happiness and the structural violence and drive to domination with which it was always entangled.)

The Double Collapse

In the opening of a hole, simultaneous falling and billowing—somehow, obscurely, like that sublime cloud that can lift a city into the air and let it drift down as ashes. But no: block that. That would require more time than we think we have. Things move quickly, we are accelerated. Time is money. The image world does so much of our work for us, delivering up the accomplished representations we no longer have time to construct for ourselves through interpretation. We are accustomed to it; it is a convention of ours. The time of mourning always lags behind the time of decision anyway, so why waste time. Precipitously, trauma is collapsed into predigested emblems: finally, into a single flag. But behind the branded stars and stripes waves the death's head and crossbones of reified structural piracy. Once again, autonomous thought is decapitated by the reduction to the Schmittian logic of friend and enemy.² The declared state of exception suspends and replaces the time of mourning and reflection. The hole in Manhattan will be filled as rapidly and heroically as possible. The questions—our questions, so many of them, indeed the question as such—are smothered by the

reasons of state. And the reasons of state, it so happens, coincide with the reasons of the world order: the capitalist world system, "Empire," as Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri would have it.[3] Nothing could be more transparent, but who's looking? We are fixed on the screen image, too busy being afraid and furious, going through the motions of pseudo-mourning.

What is avowed, in this cursory account of the relations between trauma, history, and mourning, what is affirmed and insisted on, is that the problem of mourning and working through the past is indissociable from the problem of revolutionary agency and historical transformation. This insight is not new. If the essays that follow read it in the works of Theodor Adorno and Jacques Derrida, it is hardly limited to the texts of these two philosophers. Indeed what else is the "truth" of culture, in its most profound connections to justice, than this insight? And yet—the so-called culture wars of the 1980s just behind us, the "end of history" of the 1990s even nearer—we refuse this insight. Our official cultures of memory would like to forget all suffering that is not already past. Ghosts are more easily honored than those who are now being condemned to spectrality: those forced to serve us in humiliation, or who starve, become ghosts on sickbeds, or are disappearing in the shantytowns beyond the walls of our gated communities. The more Auschwitz is mouthed and invoked, the further into oblivion it recedes. Hiroshima, managed in the opposite way, is the name that goes unspoken. Somewhere in the twists and turns of late-twentieth-century history, the dialectic of victim and perpetrator was hijacked by domination. Power smiles on a trauma industry that all too easily forgets its political links to revolutionary time.

No, we have not gotten far. In 50 years, we have yet to acknowledge, collectively, our task. The radical disenchantment, the loss of the future itself as a dependable positivity, is only unevenly and sporadically understood. Our first efforts to emplot our missed encounter have failed: we have not been willing to let go of our lost fantasies. The story we tell ourselves today has simply reinscribed the old imaginaries—purity, plenitude, virtue, progress—into a new fable of triumphant planetary capitalism. We have, once again, misrecognized the structural barbarism of economic war as the source of our freedom. And so we are repeating: looping and acting out our trauma, today in the form of a "war on terror."[4] The perpetual preemptive war for American-style "Infinite Justice" is no rational search for the conditions of mutual security; it is the symptom of our global inability to mourn.

* * *

In traditional bourgeois aesthetics, the feelings nearest to what we now associate with trauma went by the name of the sublime. In the seventeenth

and eighteenth centuries, the material effects of developing capitalism reconstructed subjectivity according to its needs. The new bourgeois subject that emerged was strung between two contradictory logics: that of an economic self compelled to wage the war of all against all and that of a legal and political self with claims to formal equality and a shared national identity. Reflecting the ideological role of natural law and right in bourgeois rationalism, and in partial compensation for this splitting in the structure of subjectivity, new aesthetic experiences of nature emerged and were codified into a new discipline. While the feeling of the beautiful simulated that reconciliation with nature missing from modern bourgeois life, the feeling of the sublime was a complex mix of terror and enjoyable awe, triggered by encounters with the power or magnitude of raw nature.

In the twentieth century, the genocidal catastrophes of human making displaced the natural disaster as the source of sublime feelings and effects—but with a crucial difference. In bourgeois aesthetics, exemplified by Kant's 1790 *Critique of Judgment*, the pain of imagination's failure before the power or size of raw nature was compensated for by reason's reflection on its own supersensible dignity and destination. Nature's threat to dominate the human was contained by human capacities for self-admiration. In the wake of Auschwitz and Hiroshima, however, the ruined dignity and destiny of human reason and its moral law can offer no compensatory pleasure. The terror of the sublime becomes a permanent, ghastly latency, compounded by the anguish of shame. "And shame, as Marx said, is a revolutionary sentiment."[5]

These essays take seriously Adorno's call to confront the categories of traditional aesthetics with catastrophic history. These engagements with contemporary art and politics work to demystify and reorient the sublime through a dialectical treatment that opens it to history and links it to the psychoanalytic category of trauma. They ask whether a sufficiently historicized and demystified category of the sublime would liberate the "transformed truth" of its feeling for the work of mourning and radical politics. Adorno had begun to push the sublime in this direction in his unfinished *Aesthetic Theory*. But the link had already been made, if implicitly, by Walter Benjamin as early as 1939, when he revised his notion of "aura" by heuristically conflating Proust's *mémoire involontaire* with Freud's theory of trauma from the 1920 *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*.

In his 1936 essay, "The Artwork in the Age of Its Technical Reproducibility," Benjamin describes aura as an effect of the authority of singular works of bourgeois art. The translation, as it were, of the authority of older sacral art into the categories of bourgeois art (autonomy, organic wholeness, genius, originality, authenticity), aura produces the feeling of an "irreducible distance" between the spectator and the work.[6] In reworking this metaphor in the 1939 "On Some Motifs in Baudelaire," Benjamin significantly shifts the ground

and source of aura's authority. There, aura becomes the feeling that surrounds returning "lost time" or the repressed images of trauma brought to consciousness by exposure to some triggering object or sensation—for example, Proust's famous madeleine. This new aura is given a neat figurative expression in a new pseudo-optical metaphor: auratic images "look back." The crucial point here is that aura's authority is no longer a function of the categories of bourgeois art becoming obsolete under the pressure of material and technological change. Aura is now the authority of the returning repressed, as the experience of modernity becomes increasingly traumatic and as experience (*Erfahrung*) itself withers for a subjectivity remade by conditions of ceaseless shock.[7] Reception will now become more and more like a form of mourning.

For Jacques Lacan, rewriting Freud's theory of trauma for his 1964 seminar was a question of a hit or *tuché*, "an appointment to which we are always called with a real that eludes us."[8] Mourning or "going-through" the fantasy of subjective plenitude and self-identity, would then involve symbolizing the wounding encounter with the real as the exposure of real subjective limits. The real will not be recuperated into the representation of trauma except as the now exposed wound or limit around which the subject was constitutively and blindly configured. The necessity of representation within the work of mourning, which Lacan's account clarifies, suggests a role for art in the processing of historical catastrophe. For Kant, the sublime was a feeling provoked by nature, rather than art. But if working through traumatic history requires an ongoing process of representation and narrative symbolization, if only to mark the limits of both, then art is clearly one site where such work can take place.

These essays propose that the sublime and its reception are disruptions through which art can link up with and modestly effect practices of daily life, at least within the limits of specific cultural situations.[9] It is argued that in certain postwar artistic practices, sublime evocations and avowals of traumatic history are used to reactivate the disruptive hit or force of such history. Through the artistic mimesis of the structure of trauma, disturbance is reinstalled in the scene and put back into play, spurring mourning back into movement. Such practices would be one way, among others, to deploy negativity to break the hold of what Herbert Marcuse criticized as "affirmative culture."[10] Through what Kant called "negative presentation," art can mark those points at which Auschwitz, Hiroshima, and other collective traumas exceed conventionalized representation. By negatively evoking such crimes and testifying to their unrepresentability through the positivities of traditional representational and narrative means, art can avow the damage they have wreaked. As we will see, both Adorno and Jean-François Lyotard advanced this negative or sublime approach to representation as the most valid and ethical aesthetic strategy after Auschwitz.

To rethink the sublime in this way cannot, however, reestablish it as anything other than a "problem." If the sublime today is a crucial category for cultural and political theory and practice, it is not as a category that has shed the ambivalence of its genealogies. Nor is it a category that can now, finally, lay claim to the positivist certainties of strict verification and proof. As a subjective feeling, a bodily response, the sublime can never be verified. The missed experience—the mis-experience, then—of the sublime would not be immediate, any more than that of trauma. Critical dialectics reveals that what is blindly and pre-critically endured is already shaped in time by a field of relations. For the subject who mis-experiences either the sublime or trauma is already a mediated construction. In the first place, mediations configure a specific predisposition; in the second, the mis-experience is mediated further by the specific contexts in which it occurs. Both levels of mediation—that of subjective predisposition and that of context or institution—are deeply marked by the social given and, together with that given, structure the conditions of whatever experience and mis-experience is possible in any historical moment.

Trauma or the sublime "event" would take place at that nexus where an empirical, psychological subject is riven by both social reality and the openings of the possible or virtual realities that would push beyond it. The mis-experience must be coped by a subject whose capacity for enlightened autonomy has been actualized to some degree or merely remains latent. The sublime, then, cannot be disentangled from the problem of subjectivity as such, as it is intersected, indeed constituted, by the problems of history, ethics, and politics, and therefore also by the problems of language, epistemology, and metaphysics. Only by traversing, rather than denying, avoiding or repressing this constellational problematic or force field can the category of the sublime be opened up, as Adorno called for, and its negative utopian impulses released.

Demystification, however, also has its limits. Aesthetics will not permit itself to be degraded into mere scientistic proceduralism. Even if all that is worth thinking is intelligible, it does not follow that it is knowable. If dialectics dissolves the frozen inertia of what can be thought without contradiction and opens it to the dynamics of time, it will not be in order to carry everything up to a terminal resolution of utter identity or final tautology; Adorno's critique of Hegel remains in force. Nor, if trauma and the sublime can be thought, will it be by the bludgeon of a positivist reduction that would force these disruptive non-transparencies to conform to the demands of a knowledge without uncertainty or else would refuse to acknowledge them at all: if we must think the sublime, we will not be able to think it as if it were merely a definable concept or a phenomenal fact that could be autopsied through exhaustive description and strictly invalidatable

propositions. Critical thought can analyze the sublime's historical forms, its figurations in inherited critical and philosophical texts and other cultural traces, and can try to recognize its movements under the mutational pressures of the contemporary. But we won't be able to avoid the irreducibility of testimony or the moment when we will have to refer it to our own aesthetic experiences and mis-experiences—in other words, to that which we are at best striving to render transparent to ourselves through self-reflection.

A thought that would claim to be anything but a provisional moment of an interminable process recoils into delusion. Critical thought enables us to work on the force field, but only from within it. As much as we would like to, we cannot work our way entirely out of the field of entanglements, in such a way that we would then be positioned over-masteringly above it all, in full and sovereign autonomy. The sublime will remain doubtful, then—dubious both to the one to whom it happens, the one who is hit and disturbed, and to others who are called to hear and evaluate the testimonies of such hits in the form of aesthetic judgments or criticism. To put it most provocatively: wherever these essays appeal to a moment of testimony, I cannot be certain that the aesthetic disturbance or mis-experience I am calling the sublime is not finally, as some skeptics would claim, reducible to a kind of projection or symptom of need. But if so, that is not knowable with certainty either. I can only trust that if I have built my analyses on an illusion that no one else shares, the mistake will have at least been a productive one.

All this is to say that the eventual theoretical assimilation of the traumatic sublime will not be able to recuperate its rupturing negativity as assured positive profit. If the transformative translation of the sublime into the politicized idioms of psychoanalytic trauma can help to demystify this traditional aesthetic category, it is not a demystification that trades the mysteries of religious revelation and pre-critical enchantment for those of an impossibly pure and "scientific" knowledge or of a politics the tendency of which is confidently fixed in advance. If the category has contemporary validity, this validity will have emerged from a process of collective sharing, contextual testing, and ongoing debate—but not as the result of anything having been conclusively demonstrated or finally put to rest. And that belongs, precisely and irreducibly, to the rigor of its disturbance and its force of resistance.

These essays contribute to the critical history of one strand of post-1945 visual art. Artists—in a line that can be traced from Arman, Yves Klein, and Daniel Spoerri to Joseph Beuys, Wolf Vostell, Jannis Kounellis, Anselm Kiefer, Christian Boltanski, Rebecca Horn, Jochen Gerz and Esther Shalev-Gerz, Rachel Whiteread, Horst Hoheisel, and others—deployed sublime negative strategies to critically represent catastrophic history. In the same European context in which Adorno struggled with the implications of Auschwitz for art, poetry, philosophy, and politics, these artists developed

and elaborated sculptural analogues of the severe literary forms of Samuel Beckett, Paul Celan, and others. Like Beckett's and Celan's, this art generally produced its effects within the established paradigm and institutions of the object-based bourgeois work or opus.

The rescuing defense of these effects, as openings to the movement of mourning, brushes against the grain a pronounced tendency within Marxist postwar theory and criticism to undervalue or even denigrate aesthetic feeling and (mis)experience.[11] The sublime, in particular, tends to be dismissed as a pathological and politically regressive return to the irrational. Inextricably associated with obsolete models of production (autonomy, genius, the organic unity of the work) and reception (private, sacral, cultic), sublime art is typically demonized as that with which a progressive and sufficiently critical art would irreparably break. The conjuring and exorcism of such a "straw"-category is not only undialectical and unhistorical, it is symptomatic of a gap or blindness within that very critico-theoretical project that is best equipped and most needed to understand the sublime. To rethink the sublime as a "category of transition" is to reject the reification of rejection.

It is no secret that within bourgeois aesthetics, the sublime has most often been aligned on the side of power. The element of domination in the category remains, as Adorno remarks, its "untruth" (AT 293/197). Lyotard, too, acknowledges that the focus on the effects of extremity can tend to encourage the valorization of extremity as such.[12] But it is not in order to repeat that swooning passivity and intoxication that seduces and neutralizes the spectator's critical capacities, or that pompous monumentality that crowds out dissent by the force of its celebration of the status quo, that these essays perform a return to the sublime. It is rather, through the labor of dialectical critique Adorno called for, to seek and set free the category's "transformed truth" (AT 507/341). The sublime, if there (still) is one—the Derridean gesture of equivocation is needed here: the uncertainty of the hit is certainly irreducible—will now be the name of an event in which ethics, politics, and aesthetics intersect, and in which mourning meets the project of transformation.

The art–historical lineage gestured to here offers us an interpretive field in which to map these intersections. At its best, this art approaches the memory of genocidal history through negative strategies of indirection and obliquity. Positive pictures of the traumatic referent and redeemed, pre-packaged narratives of the "event" are refused. The evocation and avowal of this trauma is typically held back, in a kind of deferral, through its encoding at a level below or beyond the surface or first meanings of the work. While the work often seems to be about something else, these traumatic second-order meanings then emerge with the punctum of a hit. The little trauma of sublime art models the real trauma of the historical referent in a kind of *Nachträglichkeit* of reception. In the hit in which the links with history are

suddenly disclosed, the practices and conventions of institutionalized art are also disturbed by the irruption of an inassimilable outside into a framed space essentially or principally demarked by its difference from "real life."

This postwar artistic sublime would perhaps be a specific form of a more generalized set of effects accompanying encounters with the otherness of new art: those exclamations, blinkings, and stutterings that are provoked or incited by radical aesthetic invention. But this traumatic sublime would be a wound that avows an earlier wound—the avowal of qualitative catastrophe within the claimed space of aesthetic autonomy. The investigation of the conditions and possibilities of the sublime mimesis of the structure of trauma would constitute a field of post-1945 art practice that carries on, albeit through different means, the legacy of the historical and neo-avant-gardes.

That investigation has not been without results. A number of paradoxes have emerged. Because the sublime hit depends on the predisposition of the spectator, it is subject to a law of diminishing return. No artist can continue indefinitely to create the conditions for a sublime hit. At some point the expectation of the spectator becomes prepared or conditioned, and thereafter the hit is no longer possible. Thus, the effectiveness of sublime art as a source of disturbance that can spur or continue to expose public tasks of mourning declines in proportion to its successful dissemination. Artistic practices and interventions can, within the limitations of their contexts, effectively put repressed traumatic material back into motion and thereby make it available for discourse. But the ability of any artist to do so declines as the links between his or her body of work and their historical referents become recognized and established. The label "art about Auschwitz," for example, would be fatal to that art's effectiveness.

Thus the same critical reception and theorization of the sublime that contributes to its demystification must, by naming the historical referents directly and discussing their cultural meanings, eventually neutralize the effects of the art to which it responds. In a kind of ultimate indiscretion, the theoretical reception that tries to be most open and attentive to sublime effects cannot avoid obliterating the conditions of their effectiveness even as it names and formulates them. This process, which would perhaps mark step for step the pace and extent of public mourning and disenchantment, is in practice uneven, sporadic, and subject to reversals. More spectacular and widely publicized projects are more successful at penetrating the consciousness of a wider public, but accelerate this paradoxical tendency. In this respect, the humility of Gerz's projects—*Living Monument* (1995/96) or *The Witnesses* (1998), among numerous others—seems to offer a more successful model for durable public mourning; the artist's willingness to engage small or localized groups in intense and sustained dialogue makes it more likely that sublime effects are translated into shared critical and reflective discourse.

This new negative history art was not the postwar period's most radical or direct avant-garde challenge to the paradigm of the bourgeois work and the gallery system that supports it. But in the context of reconstruction—of normalizing consumer affluence and its constructed optimism—this art's insistence that culture return to the catastrophe was radically critical. The paradoxical character of this negative artistic sublime confirms that its historical moment of effectiveness is limited. While the traumatic sublime will necessarily continue to find forms for its force of disruption, its capacity to generate a critical politics specifically in response to Auschwitz and Hiroshima may be an artistic endgame with a retrospectively recognizable vanishing point.

Beyond these paradoxes, the problem of the precise relation between trauma and the sublime still needs to be formulated more precisely. We will not be able to say, simply, that trauma occurs in "real life," while the sublime takes place in the quasi-autonomous realm of art (or of representation or of the imaginary). For today we understand that these spheres or domains are not pure or unmixed, but are largely interpenetrated. What distinguishes trauma from the hit of the sublime is rather that we are not silenced by the hit, or are not silenced so intractably. The period of *nachträgliches* deferral seems to be of shorter duration, so that we are better able to answer the call to testify to the hit, by narrating and sharing it with others. The relative safety, that is, of art's institutional frames holds open a space in which historical trauma can be experienced, in the strong sense that the Frankfurt School gave to the term *Erfahrung*: feeling interpreted by autonomous reflection. This hoped-for yield of enlightenment would be possible through the mediations of aesthetic semblance, as if, in the structure of an artistic gesture, a wound were miming a wound, in order to indirectly evoke, and thereby render thinkable, the categorically inassimilable.

But this margin of safety would itself be unsustainable. For, if this sublime is the irruption of the outside on the inside, through a mimetic slash that evokes and avows a "real" and prior gash, then the full threat and disruptive force of traumatic history would ultimately overwhelm the conventional borders between art and life. What would irrupt through the mirroring of the slash-gash would then be a representational *mise-en-abîme* in which the conceptual and categorical ground of assimilable aesthetic experience is destabilized. In the hit, a possibility structured by a string of binary oppositions—real/simulacra, inside/outside, art/life, indeed the whole "metaphysics of presence" that Derrida would deconstruct—would find its claims to self-assurance undone. The restricted effects of the traumatic sublime would be generalizable as a continuous and irreducible threat to the constitutive autonomy that makes art possible at all as a distinctive practice.

In this translation between the languages of art and psychoanalytic theory, or this articulation of their idioms, therefore, slippage between the two terms of passage, trauma and the sublime, will be unavoidable. What we can say is that if the hit is a missed encounter, it is also a call for that encounter to take place, after all. Mourning is this process of seeking to say and share, to understand by means of saying and sharing. In this process that reopens every question of the "human" (and with it the problem of the not-human), the different or uncanny temporal structure of trauma must be translated back into a more mundane periodization: first the hit, then the critical work. First the call, then the response.

But it would be too easy to depict the passage of these two commas as, simply, one between two rigidly distinct spheres or kinds of understanding: first the aesthetic, then the psychoanalitico-ethico-political. Even if the constraints of narrative emplotment must periodize this process in order to objectify, interpret, and transmit it, these spheres or moments are never purely isolated from one another. While there is indifference (and it would be the enemy of mourning), there is no disinterest. The hit cannot happen in any form or in any time or place on which the antagonistic claims of material interest and situational ethico-political obligation do not already bear. The conclusion can thus be drawn: we will find the sublime deployed against solidarity everywhere we fail to rethink it on the side of justice.

* * *

The great project of changing the world has its own twentieth-century ghosts and traumas to mourn. Traditional revolutionary theory—premised on vangard partyism and the seizure of the state as preliminary to reorganizing social relations—has in practice reproduced the logic of domination it desired to banish. For a while, following the implosion of capitalism's really-existing other and the subsequent rise of the World Trade Organization, the call for radical transformation seemed to have become a dead letter. The very horizon of imaginable change had withdrawn into a synonym for neoliberal globalization, and the only choice on offer was that or more of it. The promise of happiness had seemingly come to rest in the blind despair of lifelong consumerism, with nonparticipatory democracy one more "drive-thru" stop on the annual shopping spree.

This death of imagination called the end of history has since then come to its end. Rebellions have broken out across the core and peripheries of the capitalist world system, and neither dubious allegories of clashing civilizations nor a "war on terror" to protect the "house of freedom" can account for or neutralize them. It is true that Marxism can now be appropriated only selectively and critically—as Derrida and so many others argue today, and

as Adorno and others argued yesterday. But it is also true that the antagonistic dynamics of globalization can hardly be grasped without a Marxist conceptual heritage. Systemic critique has returned, as every repressed is bound to do. From the streets and networks, from Porto Alegre and countless other points equidistant to the center of the new global immanence, comes the refusal of a reified world.

If traditional revolutionary theory is in crisis, the attempt to rethink the crucial problems of revolutionary agency, temporality, and strategy is well underway. Although some of these essays cross recent debates on "post-Marxism," "Empire," and "cosmopolitanism," they deliberately do not leap, at this moment, to reject any of the new theoretical works or models or to pit one against the other among the forces for global justice.[13] The commitment of these essays is to a different division: to find, articulate, and endorse the anti-systemic impulses within the cultural politics of specific situations.

For that task, what remains indispensable and unassailable in the Marxist tradition is perhaps best captured in Adorno's "emphatic" notion of "truth." The "truth" of culture—whether of art, poetry, or speculative philosophy— is its desire to reach beyond the world "that is the case."[14] Truth can never be merely a positivist correspondence between claims or descriptions and a factual world. For that world itself, the social given, remains accountable to the virtual utopia that never ceases to haunt and indict it from within. The image ban on this utopia acknowledges that it cannot be imagined "truly" from within a still too-distorted subjectivity. The damage of "damaged life" cripples the leap toward a life-form that would cease to damage. But the given freedom, given happiness, and given justice, nevertheless, continue to reflect negatively the strong, unmutilated freedom, happiness, and justice that await actualization. We know now that such actualization will not be automatic—will not be the *telos* of revealed history, resistless progress, or a dialectic plotted out to completion in advance. The disappointment of this knowledge belongs to what must be mourned, but in a way that does not give up the desire for change but indeed links the work and play of mourning to it.

"The need to let suffering be voiced is the condition of all truth" (ND 29/17, translation modified). Spirit's "true concern is the negation of reification."[15] That we make our world is the time-full "truth" that "untruth" most wishes to silence. Reification is that hardening of historically produced conditions into "second nature"—a totalizing ideological and material environment experienced as timeless and unchangeable. It is an enforced forgetting of the political "truth" that structural barbarism is not necessary, not an invariable. Collectively constructed, the given world system can be collectively changed. The practical problem of how to change it, at this

point, requires radically rethinking the categories of revolutionary theory. But that the world can be changed—and that both the desire for change and the negative utopian images that provisionally orient that desire can be found within the failures and contradictions of the system itself—remains the core of "truth." To keep this negative dialectic moving, to resist its arrest and regression, is the work and play of critical thought. The same "truth" was reflected in Walter Benjamin's notion of the "dialectical image," in which the past meets the "Now" (*Jetztzeit*) in the reactivating flash of a political constellation (CH 253/390–1, 260/395–6). And it is formulated explicitly in the slogan of the first World Social Forum in Porto Alegre: "Another world is possible." Throughout these essays, where truth and untruth are written as "truth" and "untruth," the double inverted commas invoke this Marxist–Adornian baseline.

For Adorno, the only way out of the totally reified and administered world he saw coming was through the passage of enlightened, autonomous subjectivity. The catastrophe, for him, was that the means for producing free and enlightened subjects, as well as the space for their action and experience, were being systematically eliminated. This is indeed a problem that touches education and pedagogy, the opium of entertainment and the power of corporate media, and the knot of leisure time, privilege, and the division of labor: all that Adorno analyzed repeatedly as the "culture industry." Enlightenment has never been innocent, but in the absence of enlightenment the move to violence and the recourse to genocidal integrations become far more likely. For this reason alone, blanket denunciations of the Enlightenment or all-out repudiations of universal values and narratives cannot be a just response to historical injustice, however well motivated those denunciations and repudiations may be. However instrumentalized the concept of human rights may be at this time, for example, that concept reflects a "true" desire to be free of domination and violence that cannot be abandoned. We have the critical resources for distinguishing between the universal promise of human rights and the abuse of that promise.

However necessary, the rescue of the particular goes too far if it condemns the universal *tout court*. "Truth" and "untruth" are entwined in both the universal and the particular. The ceaseless determinate negation of that reified "untruth" releases the "truth" as a force or pressure on specific ethico-political situations. The attempt to actualize the good universals, however, would have to avoid clearing the way by eliminating stubborn particulars—by bombing and gassing the irreplaceably singular and nonidentical. Undoubtedly, this dilemma threatens to paralyze revolutionary desire. Placeholders do not give up their places until they are forced from them. The revolutionary refusal of what Adorno called "perennial suffering" risks the more intensive suffering of unrestrained civil war and genocide, while

the refusal to risk the latter ends in accommodation to an equally unacceptable perennial suffering. This aporia has probably motivated, in the best cases, the return to ethics of the last decades. But this return itself is to be criticized to the extent that it betrays its own promise by forgetting the imperative to struggle for systemic change—to push beyond the structural barbarism of economic war.[16]

The way through this and other aporias of the dialectic of culture and barbarism remains obscure. But it is at least clear that this way will only be found by refusing to allow critical thought to become trapped in the aporetic. Such double binds are after all themselves products of history. To permit them to be reified into ahistorical invariables would be yet another catastrophic arrest of negative dialectics. Adorno himself described this trap in the penultimate aphorism of the 1951 *Minima Moralia*. "Negative philosophy, dissolving everything, dissolves even the dissolvent" (MM 476/245). In antagonistic society, dialectics can forget its "historical intention" and fall into apologetics; dissolving the dissolvent, dialectics can ossify into stasis and fail to make its qualitative leap. "That [leap] would only be the event that ruptures" (*Der* [*Sprung*] *wäre erst das Ereignis, das hinausführt*) (MM 476/245, translation modified).

It is highly suggestive that, in formulating this notion of a radically qualitative "event" that "leads out" (*hinausführt*) of dialectical stasis and aporia, Adorno uses a term (*Ereignis*) so central to his philosophical adversary Martin Heidegger. Auschwitz, for Adorno, was precisely an "event" in that it was a qualitative leap "in the progress toward hell" (MM 452/234). But here the use of *Ereignis* suggests links, across significant differences, to elaborations of this term by Heidegger and, even more, by his French interpreters.[17] In confirming that the passage out of catastrophic domination will also, and only, be by way of a radical leap or breakout, Adorno seems especially to anticipate Derrida's attempts, in the 1994 *Specters of Marx* and elsewhere, to rethink the revolutionary event as a rupturing messianic "arrival" that would be inassimilable to the logics of existing conventions.[18] For, Derrida's basic move is to bring together an inflection of Heidegger's *Ereignis* with Benjamin's well-known 1940 essay on the concept of history. Adorno seems to anticipate the inevitability of such a move, for in the next and closing aphorism of *Minima Moralia*, he invokes, in lines that are clearly a homage to Benjamin, the notion of the "messianic" (MM 481/247).

It would be an altogether different question, of course, whether Adorno lived up to the promise of his own negative dialectic. His cultural pessimism may well have hardened to the point that the "failure of the [historical] attempt to change the world" became for him a sufficient reason to give up that attempt altogether, as anything other than the critical compensations of marginally autonomous philosophy and aesthetics (ND 15/3). At the

very least he failed his students in failing to recognize the refusals that culminated in 1968 as the radically anti-systemic force that they were—no trivial lapse for a critical dialectician.[19] His apologia, the 1969 radio talk and essay "Resignation," is persuasive but doesn't convince.[20] A masterful piece of self-assuaging dialectics, his critique of student "actionism" unjustly subsumes the abundance of new collaborative models and experiments under the derogatory category "pseudo-actions"; in this way Adorno succeeds in blinding himself to their disruptive force and mutational pressure and in slamming the door in advance on any possible "event"—a move that a rigorous negative dialectics could never endorse.

No surprise then: Adorno was not infallible. As Thomas Pepper has written in an important essay on *Minima Moralia*, the case of Adorno confirms the need to refuse "identification as a readerly strategy."[21] The Frankfurt philosopher's personal shortcomings would include, despite the openings of *Dialectic of Enlightenment* and *Minima Moralia*, a troubling unconcern for the non-European that in the context of an intensely globalizing world is emphatically "untrue." In spite of these shortcomings, Adorno's negative dialectics remains a crucial resource for those who demand a world far better than this one.

A return to humanism? Well, yes. Not to naïve humanism, the myth of progress, or false reconciliation as a cover for perpetual economic war. But, yes, to what Adorno and Max Horkheimer called, in their 1969 preface to *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, "the tendencies toward real humanity": "true" humanism.[22] Derrida's objection to this human or anthropological solidarity is also "true." The "human" is not a rigorously sustainable category; its boundaries are not strictly determinable. And wherever we draw a limit to the human, injustice has already returned.[23] The subordination of the not-human reproduces the logic of barbarism humanism seeks to escape. For every "us," there is a "them," and at the dividing limit something or someone—the stranger, the enemy, nature, the animals we raise and slaughter industrially for our caloric consumption—is made to pass to the other side in the name of purity and absolute integration. As Derrida points out, such borders and limits are at work implicitly in our current conceptions of "human rights" and "crimes against humanity." The objection indicates how much a restored humanist solidarity would still lack ethically.

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These essays reveal themselves as registrations of a compulsion to read and reread Adorno against the reifying weight of his aporias. In that, they draw ever nearer to Derrida's negative formulations of justice, as the undeconstructible condition of possibility for deconstruction (FL 14–15). For Derrida, the "ordeal" of the aporetic and the pressure of the unconditional

and aneconomic on concrete, conditioned situations cannot avoid the moment of decision. Indeed, Derrida's "hyper-critique" of performativity and his ongoing explorations of mourning and responsibility, of the structure of the "promise" and the "event" are a powerful demonstration of the possibility and necessity of linking mourning to the political project of transformation. The obligation to receive and transform the ghastly, traumatic legacies of history and tradition is, with Derrida, turned toward the future in the form of an obligation to make hospitable spaces and openings that invite the arrival of the radically other or new. The politics of hospitality would be an opening to a "democracy to come" (*démocratie à venir*). For in this inflection of a Benjaminian motif, any rupturing event of arrival might be the opening of a straight gate to revolutionary time. The critical reading of both Derrida and Adorno would vigilantly refuse tempting postures of resigned waiting. The intractable force of resistance cannot be satisfied to produce knowledge while patiently waiting for "events" of justice; the point is to bring such "events" into the world.[24] To think of the openings of transitional and revolutionary situations as anything less than aims of active political struggle would be to succumb, through whatever mediating ruses, to the practical paralysis Benjamin had already, in 1931, diagnosed as "left-wing melancholy."[25]

The remembrance of Auschwitz and Hiroshima would be mere melancholic self-indulgence, if it did not link up to the desire for ethical and structural transformation. It would be a new outrage, if present and future victims were abandoned because the demand of "never again" ceased to look for its links to the means for that demand's attainment. To repeat, mourning Auschwitz and Hiroshima can only mean working them through all the way down to the structural barbarism that made them possible. And if those traumatic "events" are "Western" crimes—if they were end-products of European modernity and its logic of instrumental reason in the service of globalizing capitalism—then they were qualitative leaps in a "progress" that had long before condemned the non-Western global majority to a shifting periphery marked for unrestricted domination, exploitation, and dispossession. The genocides of early globalization—of the colonial and imperialist eras— were less systematically pursued but were no less systemic. All this belongs no less urgently to the double project of mourning and transformation. The new global immanence will permit no forgetting of the historical backgrounds of current global urgencies.

What the atrocities of September 11 revealed, Immanuel Wallerstein controversially argues, is that the capitalist world system is breaking up.[26] As we enter a period of "global anarchy," the camps of Davos and Porto Alegre contend to shape the forms of the next world system. If this is right—and let us hope in solidarity with the global majority that it is—the outcome

remains unpredictable and uncertain. There is reason enough to fear the violence that has been unleashed. But in "truth" the old order and its reified violence are intolerable. The global periphery, having won political decolonization through struggle, has been forced into the debtor's prison of economic recolonization. Founded in racism and violence and maintained at the cost of incalculable human misery and the irrational destruction of the shared ecological base, the exploitative wealth and privilege of the global North is politically and objectively unsustainable. As Frantz Fanon argued so eloquently, the fate of the world depends on our collective response to this "truth."[27] Were the placeholders of power enlightened, they would themselves preemptively launch a radical project of sharing, democratization, and systemic reorganization. If they do not—if they go on monopolizing benefits and "externalizing" real costs and suffering to the periphery in a bid to hold on to their privileged places—then perpetual war will indeed be the fact of our future. Any renewal of radical politics will not be able to avoid reaffirming the reality of class conflict and class struggle, however these categories are rethought, renamed, or reinterpreted. We have not yet seen a world worthy of the name "postcolonial," but nothing today is more urgent than our need to bring it into existence.

Chapter One

Reading the Lisbon Earthquake: Adorno, Lyotard, and the Contemporary Sublime

Whatever is in any sort terrible, or is conversant about terrible objects, or operates in a manner analogous to terror, is a source of the sublime.

—Edmund Burke

That Auschwitz and Hiroshima are sublime is an assertion that, while never quite attaining full articulation or acceptance, seemed always to have been on the verge of becoming a commonplace of late-twentieth-century thought and theory. That critics and philosophers could have found it appropriate to link the twentieth-century historical "events" condensed in these two place-names to an aesthetic category of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries is, upon reflection, not so astonishing. In the extremity of their violence, in their intractable core of incomprehensibility, and in their fateful legacy for the future, these massively traumatic genocidal catastrophes mark a radical break in historical consciousness. Once upon a time, encounters with the power or size of nature defeated the imagination and moved us to terror and awe. After Auschwitz and Hiroshima, however, we have had to recognize such sublime effects among our own responses to this demonstrated human potential for systematic and unbounded violence. After this history, human-inflicted disaster will remain more threatening, more sublime, than any natural disaster.

Sixty years later, we still live in the shadows of these events. We continue to be unsure of their meaning for our present and future. Historians and intellectuals are still debating to what extent Auschwitz can be understood at all—whether as the result of specifiable conditions of possibility, of structural social, economic, and political dynamics, or of individual and collective human failures. These debates have so far tended to hinge on the question of the "uniqueness" of the Nazi genocide. For some, like Elie Wiesel and Claude Lanzmann, the singularity of the Jewish *shoa* is such that any attempt

to intellectually "understand" it, for example, through comparison to other historical genocides, is already an unacceptable insult to the memory of its victims. Others—perhaps a majority of the historians and theorists working on this issue, a group that would include Saul Friedlander, Dominick LaCapra, and Enzo Traverso—have tried to do justice to the singularity of Auschwitz while, at the same time, insisting on the need to analyze its origins and specificity by means of rigorously contextual and comparative methodologies.[1] This debate itself emerged from a postwar context in which a specifically post–Auschwitz Jewish collective memory was constructed against the resistance of constant pressures for normalization. It continues to simmer and flash against a shifting contemporary context marked by the gradual ossification of expressions of mourning and remorse into rigid conventions and formal rituals, by evidence of the organized instrumental-ization of victim status for political and financial gain, and by an intensifi-cation of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict. The polarized international reception of Norman Finkelstein's *The Holocaust Industry*, is itself an indi-cation of the complex and contentious juncture this legacy has reached.[2]

The first use of nuclear weapons and the deliberate destruction of 300,000 men, women, and children in Hiroshima and Nagasaki present us with a related set of problems. This genocidal atrocity, however, has not received the same level of concentrated and sustained critical and theoreti-cal reflection. The disparity in the number of victims alone does not suffice to explain this deficit of attention. While Gar Alperovitz, Barton Bernstein, and others have subjected the "official" memory of American first use to relentless demystification, the efforts of these historians have neither led to any formal acknowledgment from the U.S. government nor have they triggered any broad or deep cultural project of mourning.[3] It would indeed seem to be the case that Hiroshima remains a "repressed" crime, largely insulated from critical reflection by the institutional weight of what Robert Jay Lifton and Greg Mitchell have called American "denial."[4] Despite the scandalous 1995 censorship of an exhibition on this theme at the Smithsonian Institution's National Air and Space Museum in Washington, calls to remember and work through the nuclear bombings have to date remained isolated and unanswered.[5] They have not been able to accumulate, as the responses to Auschwitz have done, into an accepted and influential cultural project capable of penetrating public indifference and transforming official memory.[6]

Nevertheless, the linking of Auschwitz and Hiroshima, as the names for the threshold events of twentieth-century violence, has been a persistent, if minoritarian, phenomenon since the postwar period. While figures from the cultural and political left, from Primo Levi and Jean-Luc Godard to Desmond Tutu and Ernest Mandel, have made such links explicitly, the two place-names have more often been brought into proximity through subtler

and more oblique artistic means and figures of thought. Here, Marguerite Duras and Alain Resnais's 1959 film *Hiroshima mon amour* would be exemplary. Obviously Auschwitz and Hiroshima are not identical historical events. Nor has anyone, to my knowledge, seriously argued that Auschwitz and Hiroshima are morally equivalent crimes. Both names stand, however, for the realization of similar but distinct societal capacities for maximum violence, more or less traceable to shared conditions of possibility at a deep structural level. While acknowledging the differences between German fascism and American liberal democracy, as well as the national experiences they reflect, it is still undeniable that both political forms emerged from a common European tradition and capitalist order. The persistent linkage between the two names does, therefore, imply a shared political and ethical failure, as well as a common legacy of diminished human dignity and increased insecurity that all latecomers will have to bear. The brute fact that centuries of Enlightenment culture failed to prevent Auschwitz or Hiroshima, remains a severe and implacable indictment of that culture and the capitalist social forms that produced it. This minimal formulation would reflect the common ground between two influential postwar figures whose struggles with this genocidal legacy would, in other respects, part radically, Theodor W. Adorno and Jean-François Lyotard.

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Adorno's sustained reflections on the topos "after Auschwitz" are an indispensable contribution to the postwar processing of that catastrophe. It has been less well-remarked, however, that the need for the most rigorous specification of the relation between Auschwitz and Hiroshima is already pointed to, if not realized, in Adorno's 1966 radio talk "Education after Auschwitz."[7] It is also Adorno who, in the "Draft Introduction" to his posthumously published *Aesthetic Theory*, calls for the dialectical transformation of the categories of traditional Western aesthetics:

> In the age of the irreconcilability of traditional aesthetics and contemporary art, the philosophical theory of art has no choice but, varying a maxim of Nietzsche's, by determinate negation to think the categories that are in decline as categories of transition. The elucidated and concrete dissolution of conventional aesthetics is the only remaining form that aesthetics can take; it at the same time sets free the transformed truth of these categories. (AT 507/341)

Adorno makes no concessions to accessibility in his treatment of the sublime in the *Aesthetic Theory*: invocations of the category and passing, fragmentary discussions occur across the whole of that difficult text. He does, however, offer

two relatively concentrated shards of analysis, and these two moments are consistent with and illuminated by propositions and argumentation to be found in his literary criticism and in the 1966 *Negative Dialectics*.[8] In the latter work, as we will see, Adorno concisely formulates the impact of catastrophic history on the traditional sublime.

Lyotard, for his part, is the figure most associated today with the contemporary revival of the aesthetic category. His analyses of the sublime as the feeling that accompanies evocations of the "unpresentable," published in a series of essays and texts beginning in 1982, were and remain widely influential on the theory and criticism of contemporary art.[9] Lyotard's historicization of the sublime, however, is limited to his claim that its reinscription in European literary criticism in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, marked a shift from a classical poetics centered on the imitation of models to an aesthetics concerned with provoking intense feelings in the spectator: "It is around this name [the sublime] that the destiny of classical poetics was hazarded and lost; it is in this name that aesthetics asserted its critical rights over art, and that romanticism, in other words modernity, triumphed" (TI 92). Relying heavily on Martin Heidegger's notion of *Ereignis* ("event" or "occurrence"), Lyotard reformulates the sublime as "the event of a passion, of a possibility for which the mind will not have been prepared, which will have unsettled it, and of which it conserves only the feeling—anguish and jubilation—of an obscure debt" (TI 141). The modernist artistic project is then defined as the ongoing investigation of these effects: "The artist attempts combinations allowing the event" (TI 101). As stimulating as Lyotard's rewriting of the sublime is, his account of its historical development is inadequate. He does not tell us why sublime effects suddenly became interesting for seventeenth-century literary critics like Boileau, or why this shift from poetics to aesthetics was received so readily. Nor do we learn what social or ideological functions the valorization of the sublime may have served or have been made to serve. Such a historicization, handled dialectically, would be part of the full "elucidated and concrete dissolution" of the category called for by Adorno.

What Adorno and Lyotard had in common, with respect to the sublime, was a lucid appreciation for the possible applications of Immanuel Kant's notion of "negative presentation" (*negative Darstellung*: "negative exhibition," in Werner Pluhar's translation), from the "Analytic of the Sublime" of the 1790 *Critique of Judgment*.[10] For Adorno, this method of evoking without invoking, consistent with the traditional Jewish ban on images and for him exemplified in the postwar period by Samuel Beckett's *Endgame*, would be central to his theorization of an "after-Auschwitz" ethic of representation. It is thus one figure of thought in which he links, albeit indirectly, Auschwitz and the sublime. Lyotard, however, makes "negative

presentation" a centerpiece of his Heideggerian redaction of the aesthetic category. For, while the "unpresentable" cannot be represented, the fact "that there is an unpresentable" can be presented and represented "negatively." Such negative presentations, in evoking the fact "that something happens rather than nothing," are the states of privation through which the event is disclosed to "disarmed" thought.[11]

For Lyotard, as for Adorno, negative presentation is the most appropriate figure for approaching that dimension of Auschwitz that stubbornly resists traditional representational strategies. However, Lyotard's reliance on a Heideggerian idiom, with its pronounced hostility to rational thought and critique, is a sharp point of divergence from Adorno's treatment of negative presentation. Heidegger was, for Adorno, an irreconcilable philosophical antagonist; the "fundamental ontology" of the Freiburg Master remained, for the Frankfurt critical theorist, a "philosophy of repristination" that always ends by serving the cause of social and political barbarism.[12] Heidegger's notion of *Ereignis* can undeniably be interpreted within the register of the sublime. But by giving this term centrality in his account, Lyotard risks letting the problem of the sublime be overwhelmed by the problem of Heidegger's Nazi interlude. And while maintaining this link to Heidegger possibly serves the purpose of insisting on the sublime's status as a problem made urgent by Auschwitz, the programmatic devaluation of critical faculties that follows from a Heideggerian approach does tend, as Adorno argued, to re-mystify the category. Shifting the accent back onto the Kantian terms of analysis and historicizing them more rigorously, however, would go far in the direction of the "determinate negation" Adorno called for and would clarify how and why the sublime has reemerged in the wake of Auschwitz and Hiroshima.

* * *

In 1674, Nicolas Boileau-Despraux translated Pseudo-Longinus's first century treatise on the sublime into French, thus bringing the category back into European critical currency. Lyotard indicates that Boileau's emphasis on the intensity of the feelings produced in the reader marks a crucial shift from rhetoric and poetics to the new discipline of aesthetics. This new discipline would be formally inaugurated, as the "sister" of reason, by Alexander Baumgarten in 1751. In his 1990 *The Ideology of the Aesthetic*, Terry Eagleton gives us a suggestive materialist study of this moment, arguing that the emergence of aesthetics corresponded to developing capitalism's need at that time to ground itself firmly in the realm of feelings and emotion.[13] Eagleton's account inflects the basic Marxist critique of bourgeois artistic autonomy, formulated powerfully in, for example, Herbert Marcuse's 1937

essay "The, Affirmative Character of Culture."[14] The new bourgeois subject of capitalism, Eagleton argues, was required to perform under some tough conditions: it had to accept and function within an isolating and barbarous economic competition and at the same time consent to be collectivized under a new form of state power organized around the notion of formal, rights-based equality. Aesthetics, as a "discourse of the body" that codifies the responses to "autonomous" art objects, provided the needed model for a projected ideal of bourgeois subjectivity. Like the work of art, the ideal bourgeois subject would be self-determining and self-regulating.

The codification of aesthetics in the mid-1700s, then, not only marked out a compensatory field of respite from the stresses of survival under the antagonistic and unforgiving reign of exchange value, but it also reflected the actual investment and mobilization of feelings as a form of what Antonio Gramsci called "hegemony." The requirements of the social structure are internalized and harmonized to the body just as, in aesthetics, the body is harmonized to the artefact. "The ultimate binding force of the bourgeois social order, in contrast to the coercive apparatus of absolutism," writes Eagleton, "will be habits, pieties, sentiments and affections. And this is equivalent to saying that power in such an order has become aestheticized" (p. 20). Thus, while the aesthetic is "a bourgeois concept in the most literal historical sense," it is a "deeply ambivalent" and contradictory one. For while aesthetics helps to mystify the bourgeois subject into "mistaking necessity for freedom and oppression for autonomy," it also "belongs with the historic victory of bourgeois liberty and democracy over a barbarously repressive state" (pp. 8, 27).

Eagleton's Marxist account reminds us that the formalized sphere of "the aesthetic," despite the ideological role assigned to it, preserves the emancipatory logic of its historical origins: its categories, no less than those of Enlightenment-era political liberalism, reflect, at least negatively, what Marcuse and Adorno liked to call the "promise of happiness." To recover the force of this blocked utopian demand would be "to set free the transformed truth of these categories" (Adorno). Eagleton's handling of the category of the sublime, however, is less than convincing. His reading of both Burke and Kant suggests, reductively and too literally, that the sublime plays the role of a jolting antidote to the pleasure of the beautiful. The harmony from which that pleasure derives (in Kant, the fit or correspondence between the way in which the imagination synthesizes manifolds and the way in which the understanding subsumes particulars into concepts) provides an ideological model for the self-description of bourgeois subjectivity. But, he continues, the dependence of this model on pleasure is not without risks, for the lures of sensory pleasure are always capable of turning the bourgeois subject into a decadent sensualist. That won't do, since the whole point is to put

subjects to work: to plug them into the economy, as the exploiters or the sellers of labor. The danger, then, is that the beautiful, which the eighteenth century gendered as feminine, might tempt subjects into trying to actualize the promised harmony—as unproductive and uncompetitive seekers of warm, fuzzy feelings. The sublime offers a "manly" solution to the problem. The pain and disturbance of the sublime functions to jolt would-be aesthetes out of their voluptuous reveries and set them back to work. The sublime is necessary within bourgeois aesthetics, Eagleton contends, to counteract the threat beauty poses to productivity (pp. 54–5, 89–93).

There were, however, other historical and equally materialistic reasons for the reappearance and acceptance of the category at that time. Kant's analysis of the sublime in the *Critique of Judgment* marks the intersection of the rationalist Enlightenment project by the cultural traces of some historically specific corporeal experiences. As Marjorie Hope Nicolson had carefully demonstrated in 1959, it was the steady accumulation of testimonies and travel accounts of English elites on the Grand Tour that transformed the literary sublime of Longinus and Boileau into a new taste for mountains and the sublime in nature. Following the religious wars and again after the Restoration, members of the English ruling classes and their middlemen made their way to Italy, crossing the Alps en route and encountering there the towering peaks and vertiginous passages and vistas that would become the basic tropes of sublimity. By the end of the seventeenth century, the enthusiastic reports of writers like John Dennis were reconceiving the experience of the Alpine transit. Formally an unavoidable episode of fear and trembling endured as the price for reaching the pleasures and treasures of Italy, the mountain crossing now became an object of aesthetic appreciation in its own right. "We walk'd upon the very brink, in the literal sense, of Destruction," writes Dennis, after crossing the Alps in 1688. "The sense of all this produc'd different motions in me, viz., a delightful Horrour, a terrible joy, and at the same time, that I was infinitely pleas'd, I trembled."[15] The mixing of terror and delight formulated here, precisely anticipates the later descriptions of the feeling of the sublime in Burke and Kant. Dennis was, in fact, the first to have critically distinguished between the sublime and the beautiful on the basis of the feelings they provoked. Only in 1756, after the passion for mountains had taken strong hold and laid the affective ground for the new scientific discipline of geology, would Edmund Burke be able to systematize this categorical distinction and establish it as central for European aesthetics in his *Philosophical Enquiry into the Origins of Our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful.*

Developing the social and ideological dimensions that Nicolson left unanalyzed, we can recognize in this emerging capacity to derive a painful aesthetic pleasure from the observation of the size or power of nature a new

mark of "distinction." Pierre Bourdieu has sharpened our ability to understand forms of taste as the bearers of social functions that are anything but "disinterested": they define sets of competencies that elevate members of groups possessing the means to acquire them above the members of other less-privileged groups, thus confirming and reproducing social hierarchies.[16] To be able to find pleasure in avalanches and fissured glacier fields, sets English nobles and bourgeois travelers on the Grand Tour apart from Swiss peasants, for whom such natural features are a despised daily danger. The rich on vacation can be moved to a pleasurable awe by the sight of a storm at sea; the fisherman and sailor know otherwise. To workers in the coalmines and mills of the newly industrializing centers, sublime peaks and the stormy sea would have been equally alien. In a revealing moment of the *Critique of Judgment*, Kant would acknowledge that the sublime presupposes the possession of a certain "culture," that it indeed requires more culture than the beautiful: the sublime is thus a more exclusive taste—a more expensive distinction.[17] The "mountain sublime" so central to English elite taste, then, emerged as a kind of happily motivated by-product of the impulse behind the Grand Tour, that institution for the acquisition of distinction and of cultural goods in the form of Mediterranean art and antiquities. One more material marker, that is, of London's rise, within the context of latent and emergent imperialist competition. While it would be interesting to analyze the role of nationalism within the reception and dissemination of this new form of taste, the fact that the mountain sublime was by the end of the seventeenth century a recognizably English enthusiasm may well have facilitated its canonization within continental aesthetics over the course of the next century.

* * *

Between the establishment of the sublime as a new form of taste and distinction and its classic Kantian formulations in the *Critique of Judgment*, another formative event irrupted into European consciousness. On November 1, 1755, an earthquake destroyed the city of Lisbon, killing, according to Walter Benjamin, roughly a quarter of its 250,000 inhabitants and damaging towns and villages from Morocco to France. Tremors were felt throughout Europe, and tidal surges were observed in Finland and at the mouth of the Elbe. In October 1931, Benjamin wrote a 20-minute radio talk for children, on the subject of the Lisbon earthquake. This talk—exploiting the narrative potential of the disaster while ostensibly drawing on a shared reservoir of humanist empathy for the suffering of its victims—reads today rather like a failed advertisement for technology's promise to liberate man from the destructive power of nature. Benjamin vividly describes how the

earthquake "excited and preoccupied the entire world like few other events in that century." All over Europe the presses rushed into print countless eyewitness accounts; these pamphlets were hungrily consumed by people who had felt, albeit from a distance, the power of this disaster in the senses and sympathies of their own bodies. As Benjamin informs his audience of children, one of those hungry consumers was a young man in East Prussia:

> No one was more fascinated by these remarkable events than the great German philosopher Kant, whose name may be familiar to some of you. At the time of the earthquake he was a young man of twenty-four, who had never left his hometown of Königsberg—and who would never do so in the future. But he eagerly collected all the reports of the earthquake that he could find, and the slim book he wrote about it probably represents the beginnings of scientific geography in Germany. And certainly the beginnings of seismology.[18]

This "slim volume," published in 1756, bears the ponderous title *History and Natural Description of the most Remarkable Incidents of the Earthquake that Shook* [erschüttert hat] *a Large Part of the Earth at the End of the Year 1755.* Perhaps wishing to reassure his young audience, less than a year and a half before the Nazis gained control of the German state, Benjamin emphasizes the ways in which the Lisbon earthquake was a stimulus to scientific research and to the development of technical instruments of measurement and prediction. On the philosophical impact of the disaster, Benjamin is conspicuously silent. In the words of one Voltaire scholar, the Lisbon earthquake was "the death of optimism."[19] At the very least, it confronted a longstanding debate among European *philosophes* with some very troubling counterevidence to the intuitive endorsement of metaphysical optimism. A short review of this debate will clarify an under-remarked context of Kant's third *Critique*. Pierre Bayle had in 1697 constructed a dialectical pastiche of fragments of classical history and philosophy that seemed to conclude that the universe was not all for the best: evil was loose in the world and largely in control. Leibniz, in his 1710 *Theodicy*, answered this pessimism with a metaphysics grounded in a rational proof of God's existence and goodness: from the very idea of God, it followed that the universe he created was, famously, "the best of all possible worlds." Pope, in his 1733 *Essay on Man*, confirmed Leibniz's conclusion: reason itself proves that evil can only exist for the sake of a greater good. Voltaire had initially aligned himself with Leibniz and Pope, but the Lisbon earthquake broke his faith with Pope's formula "Whatever is, is right" (rendered into French as *tout est bien*). He repudiated that doctrine in his 1756 "Poem on the Lisbon Disaster," thereby provoking an angry diatribe from Rousseau.[20]

Well read in these debates and personally invested, so to speak, in the Lisbon disaster, Kant would eventually consider the pessimists answered, by

the three volumes of his critical system. For, if Kant's supplementary discussions of enlightenment and universal history openly endorse the ruling order and its state ("Dare to know and argue, but obey!"), the articulation of these essayistic political writings with the major texts of his transcendental idealism implicitly vindicates the doctrine "Whatever is, is right." Within the *Critique of Judgment* itself, we can read the effects of the Lisbon earthquake between the lines of the "Analytic of the Sublime." In his analysis of the aesthetic judgment of the beautiful, Kant had attributed the feeling of pleasure by which beauty is recognized to a harmony between the mind's powers or faculties of imagination and understanding. Judgments of the sublime, however, involve an "indirect" or "negative" pleasure: a pleasure mixed with pain. Specifically, the feeling of the sublime is a pleasure that the mind itself produces in order to compensate itself for the pain it feels when the imagination reaches its limit.

This can happen in two ways. Before the magnitude of "rude nature" (desolate deserts, the ocean, the starry night), the imagination, striving to synthesize this manifold, breaks down and falls back in frustration. Similarly, before some expression of nature's violent power (lightning storms, volcanoes, hurricanes), the imagination can only recognize the body's "physical impotence." The first case Kant names the "mathematical sublime," the second, the "dynamic sublime." In both cases, the imagination is rescued from its pain and distress by the power of reason: the crisis or privation itself calls to mind the fact that among the mind's own powers is one that is supersensible and superior to nature. Reason produces the idea of infinity to soothe the pain of the mathematical sublime, and answers the dynamic sublime by reminding itself of the irreducible dignity of the human calling to live as free moral agents, who legislate to themselves the law of their own reason. First, pain: the imagination is humiliated before the power or size of nature. Then, pleasure, admiration, self-respect: the fallback to reason, that power of the mind that elevates humanity above mere sensible nature, however mighty or boundless it may be. Terror and shame give way to a proud and enjoyable self-contemplation.

It is at the end of the analysis of the mathematical sublime, and just before Kant begins the explication of the dynamic sublime, that the textual effects of the Lisbon earthquake first become legible, as an echoing resonance:

> In presenting the sublime in nature the mind feels *agitated* [*bewegt*], while in an aesthetic judgment about the beautiful in nature it is in *restful* contemplation. This agitation (above all at its inception) can be compared with a tremor [*Erschütterung*: a shuddering vibration, disruption, blow, shock, trauma], i.e., with a rapidly alternating [*schnellwechselnden*] repulsion from and attraction to the same object. For the imagination (driven to such agitation as it apprehends some object in intuition), this gushing and effusing

[*das Überschwengliche*] is, as it were, an abyss [*Abgrund*] in which it fears to lose itself. Yet at the same time, from the perspective of reason's idea of the super-sensible, this object doesn't gush or effuse at all; rather, it conforms to reason's law for the imagination to strive in this way. Thus, the object is now attractive to the same degree to which, before, it was repulsive to mere sensibility. (CJ §27 181–2/115, translation modified)

Unmistakably, we can feel the memory of Lisbon in Kant's metaphor and word choice: the sublime moves the mind like the tremors or deep shudders of an earthquake. Amidst all the vibrating, gushing, and shaking, this natural object that defeats the imagination opens up like an abyss; registration of threat, reason to the rescue.

What is remarkable—and surely symptomatic of an "interest," if not remembered anxiety—is that Kant does not name the Lisbon earthquake anywhere in the *Critique of Judgment*. In fact, it is conspicuously absent from the passage, early in the explication of the dynamic sublime, in which we would expect to find it. Kant lines up a set of examples (in order: overhanging cliffs, thunderclouds with lightning, volcanoes, hurricanes, the heaving ocean, high waterfalls, "and so on") to suggest the violence of sublime natural power: "Compared to the might of any of these, our ability to resist becomes an insignificant trifle" (CJ §28 185/120). But no Lisbon earthquake, or any earthquake at all, makes it into this list. Only several pages on, when he pauses to summarily reiterate the sources of the dynamic sublime, does Kant let slip the feared word, in its most generic form: "in certain situations—in tempests, storms, earthquakes, and so on" (CJ §28 187/122). Despite these evasions—and, indeed, through the very figure of negative presentation—the Lisbon earthquake haunts the text: its very absence calls it back into presence. And this brief symptomatic reading, clarifies to what degree the ideological function of the aesthetic category of the sublime within Kant's critical system is anxiously bound up with the deep metaphysical optimism—indeed bourgeois optimism—at the core of the Enlightenment project.

On the standard interpretation, Kant's transcendental idealism was intended to refute both skepticism and unbound metaphysical speculation (or: both Hume and Leibniz). Following the fissures of the Lisbon disaster to the point of their repression in the *Critique of Judgment* brings back into view a different textual burden: the need to silence pessimism—as a meta-physical position to be sure but even more as a persistent psychological anxiety. Kant's well-known political essays on universal history, cosmopolitanism, and enlightenment argue that it is at least reasonable to believe that nature has a purpose and unfolds progressively through human reason. But even our cursory symptomatic reading shows that the tremors of the 1755 earthquake were still being felt in Königsberg more than 30 years later, as Kant was

working out the "Analytic of the Sublime." He needed to domesticate those eruptions of sublime nature, of which the Lisbon earthquake was exemplary in his own century, in order to neutralize the threat they posed to a myth of progress grounded in natural law and a purported human nature. And we can see how he accomplished that by redescribing the feeling of the sublime as the subordination of sensible nature *in toto* to the supersensible power or capacity of human nature. Through the power of reason and its moral law, the great evil of natural catastrophe is elevated, transfigured, and "sublimed" into a foil for human dignity. No effect without a cause, all for the best, *tout est bien*.

* * *

It would be this myth of progress—as the steady perfection of human capacities, and in particular moral capacities, and thus the steady realization of human dignity—that Auschwitz and Hiroshima would seem to have killed off, along with the targeted victims. In "After Auschwitz," the first of the powerful "Meditations on Metaphysics" that end the *Negative Dialectics*, Theodor Adorno argues that at the end of the line in Auschwitz, history finally undid the claim of traditional metaphysics to be able to recuperate evil as a moment within the unfolding of a greater good. The catastrophe that resounds in this place-name is the unanswerable repudiation of all "positive dialectics." After Auschwitz, "feeling" (*das Gefühl*) revolts against any attempt by reasoned thought to attribute positivity to existence: feeling knows affirmative metaphysics is now bankrupt and that any denial of this is "prating and injustice to the victims" (ND 354/361). As well as rewriting Hegel in the light of the catastrophe, negative dialectics would refute the positivism that had, since Ludwig Wittgenstein, become dominant as so-called analytic philosophy. Auschwitz demonstrates the inadequacy and "untruth" of thinking that restricts itself to tautological verifications of the "world that is the case."

Shortly after this appeal to *aesthesis*, Adorno installs a sentence that condenses much of the historical and intellectual background we have been reading here and concisely formulates the historical transformation of the sublime:

> The earthquake of Lisbon reached far enough to cure Voltaire of Leibniz's theodicy, and the visibly comprehensible [*überschaubare*] catastrophe of the first nature was insignificant compared to that of the second, social one, which defies human imagination since it readied real hell from human evil. (ND 354/361, translation modified)

Natural disasters are sublime eruptions of "the first nature" (*der ersten Natur*), the "real" one, what we still know as the natural world beyond

the human. The "second" nature, the social one (*der zweiten, gesellschaftlichen*), is, since Marx and Lukács, the human realm of reified social relations that appear to us as natural.[21] That is, the social seems to be ruled by immutable, timeless, and therefore "naturalized" laws, because from inside society, the fact that social relations are a construction—historical, human, and thus alterable—is concealed from experience. What we experience as second nature is naturalized ideology, or "phantom objectivity." For Adorno reification is the veil of "untruth"—"too little enlightenment," "a deathmask," ideology that "drones, as it were, from the gears of an irresistible praxis" (CCS 17/24, 25/30, 24/29). It would appear, then, that the second, social and historical, disaster was Auschwitz itself. But Auschwitz, he tells us later in the same paragraph, was only the "first sample" (*erstes Probestück*) of a structural barbarism he here names "perennial suffering" (*das perennierende Leiden*) (ND 355/362). Auschwitz should rather be seen as a violent eruption of "objective social conditions" that quite bluntly "continue to exist"—both in the capitalist West and what was then the Soviet bloc (WTP 139–40/98–9). For Adorno, the division of labor and the reified nexus of instrumental reason, universalized exchangeability, and culture industry are the bases of a global order in which most people are held in enforced political and ethical immaturity (*Unmündigkeit*) and in which, therefore, the potential for genocidal repetitions is always present.[22]

What Adorno has concisely, if implicitly, carried out in this one sentence on the Lisbon earthquake, then, is that "determinate negation" that confronts the traditional category of the sublime with the material disaster of contemporary history. Sublime natural disasters were still comprehensible (*überschaubare*: literally, "overseeable") and recuperable because, in Kant's idiom, human reason and dignity could still claim to be superior to nature. Auschwitz objectively shattered the fiction of this supersensible human "destination" (*Bestimmung*) by confronting it with the "fate" (*Schicksal*) of the victims. The compensatory, second-stage pleasure of the traditional sublime, anchored in metaphysical optimism, is no longer possible: after the industrialized genocide of the camps, all we are left with is the anguish of the imagination and a desolated human dignity. Moreover, Kant had made it clear that we cannot have the feeling of the (traditional) sublime if we are actually afraid: "it is impossible to like terror that we take seriously" (CJ §28 185/120). The legacy of Auschwitz and, even more, of Hiroshima, is that there is no safe place from where we can observe and reflect on these events. There is no place that the threat of terror and extreme violence does not now reach.

Adorno's treatment of the sublime in the *Aesthetic Theory* confirms and elaborates the transformation just analyzed. While a separate essay would be necessary to track and gloss the category as it appears within that resistant but rewarding text, a short citation from one dense passage in particular will

reinforce the reading advanced here. For it is certainly no accident that Adorno chose to condense the ruination of the Kantian sublime in the face of contemporary history into a word, with which we have now become familiar: *Erschütterung*, the tremor or shudder of what is beyond imagination and conventionalized experience—the shock waves of traumatic occurrence:

> The shock [*Betroffenheit*: consternation, confusion, dismay] aroused by important [art]works is not used to trigger personal, otherwise repressed emotions. This shock belongs rather to the instant in which the recipients forget themselves and disappear into the work: the moment of *Erschütterung*. They lose the ground beneath their feet; the possibility of truth, embodied in the aesthetic image, becomes corporeal for them. . . . *Erschütterung*, starkly opposed to the normal conception of experience [*Erlebnisbegriff*], is no particular satisfaction for the ego, is not at all like pleasure. It is rather a memento of the liquidation of the ego, which, shaken to the core [*als erschüttertes*], becomes aware of its own limitedness and finitude. (AT 363–4/244–5, translation modified)[23]

In 1983, 14 years after Adorno's death, Lyotard published *The Differend*. In a crucial moment of that text, in a section that struggles with the status of phrases that include Nazi names, he argues controversially that Auschwitz imposes a silence on historians, because it refers to something that cannot be phrased under accepted idioms, in a way that could then be validated under the "cognitive regimen" of history. This silence, however, does not impose forgetting. Rather, "it imposes a feeling" that "is a sign for the common person." "Suppose," Lyotard writes,

> that an earthquake destroys not only lives, buildings, and objects but also the instruments used to measure earthquakes directly and indirectly. The impossibility of quantitatively measuring it does not prohibit, but rather inspires in the minds of the survivors the idea of a very great seismic force. The scholar claims to know nothing about it, but the common person has a complex feeling, the one aroused by the negative presentation of the indeterminate.[24]

The struggle of this passage, which seems almost to respond to the remnants of optimism still legible in Benjamin's 1931 text on the Lisbon earthquake, is exactly contemporaneous with the beginning of Lyotard's sustained engagement with the category of the sublime. In January of the same year in which *The Differend* appeared, Lyotard read the first version of his essay "The Sublime and the Avant-Garde" at the Hochschule der Künste in Berlin.

Joseph Beuys and the "After-Auschwitz" Sublime

In one of his last major public addresses, delivered at the Münchner Kammerspiele in November 1985 as part of the lecture series "Talking About One's Own Country," Joseph Beuys reflected on his decision to become an artist. After beginning studies in the natural sciences, he concluded that his "possibility" would not be realized within the confines of a narrow scientific specialty. His "gift" or "ability" (*Fähigkeit*) was rather "to give a comprehensive impetus to the task that the people [*Volk*] had." (*Volk*, he explains, refers to a language community, not to a race.) He turned to art and developed a notion of sculpture that began with language and concepts, because that enabled him to produce "forward-looking images." But his decision had also to do, he continued, with his realization that such an art, linked to the German language and to the people who speak it, "was also the only way to overcome all the still racially driven machinations, terrible sins, and not for describing black marks, without losing sight of them for even a moment."[1]

The project that for two decades was both the theme and the asserted goal of Beuys's public discourse, and which is now firmly associated with his name, combined an ambitiously programmatic "expanded concept of art" (*erweiterter Kunstbegriff*) with a deep engagement with the cultural tradition. While the first part of the project, striving for social transformation, was purported by Beuys to be "the end of modernity, the end of all traditions,"[2] the second would seem to have rehearsed, in accordance with Ezra Pound's famous dictum, well established modernist strategies for "making it new." The tension between the pull of tradition and the need to break with it fueled an enormous material production: drawings, sculpture, multiples, monumental installations. Beuys's objects are relics of his utopian program—of the public persona, the unceasing pronouncements and provocations, the lectures and actions, the challenging exhortations to create a new social order. But they are also relics of a conflicted relationship between the two parts of the project. Arguing for a conception of art that would take society and the

whole world as the materials for a vast collaborative *Gesamtkunstwerk*, he nevertheless supplied the usual art world institutions with a highly individualized and stylistically coherent body of objects. The much-repeated claim that Beuys's life was his art, or at least that the two are inseparable, takes for granted both his stated intentions and their successful realization. As a few critics have noted, the reality is more complicated.[3]

As if that was not enough, there is alongside the announced project another one that the artist for the most part left unacknowledged. This parallel project's gaze was fixed somberly on the catastrophe and genocide of the Nazi period and encoded the production with another, grimmer level of meaning. Evoking and avowing Auschwitz through various strategies, Beuys's pieces and actions can also be read as objects and gestures of mourning. As the cited passage makes clear, it would be wrong to say that Beuys never acknowledged this other project.[4] But he never emphatically asserted it as a project per se, in the way he tirelessly did on behalf of the "expanded concept of art." It is clear from his words that he preferred to speak of the future and of the "forward-looking" aspect of his activities. However, on this occasion at least Beuys acknowledged that the "task that the people had" was inextricably linked to the legacy of the war years. But if his art carried the capacity to "overcome" "terrible sins" and "not for describing black marks," Beuys nevertheless chose in this regard to let the objects speak for themselves.[5]

This choice has proven fateful to Beuys's reception as an artist. Critics have focused on the announced project—on the "expanded concept of art" and the engagement with tradition—to the virtual exclusion of the second. Kim Levin had already remarked this state of affairs in her perceptive review of Beuys's 1979/80 Guggenheim retrospective. "There is," she wrote, "a secret narrative in Beuys, of which no one dares speak. Autobiography is an accepted content for art; the atrocities of Nazi Germany are not."[6] She went on to suggest that many of the pieces installed by Beuys as "stations" descending the Guggenheim's spiral ramps could be seen as allusions to the Nazi genocide, and in a later essay, she suggested that this "secret narrative" had been uncovered and accepted in the wake of the retrospective exhibition.[7] In fact, the analysis of Auschwitz references in Beuys for which she implicitly called has never materialized. If Beuys's second project—the project of mourning—has any place at all in the literature, it is a marginal one, unsupported by any close and coherent reading of the works as a whole.

The reasons for this are complex and in America, perhaps, were exacerbated by widespread critical unease in the wake of Benjamin H. D. Buchloh's rhetorically forceful attack on the mythical foundations of Beuys's public persona.[8] In focusing on Beuys's asserted project and in accepting the purported unity of his life and work, critics have restricted themselves to a

general dependence on Beuys's own discourse and self-interpretations. Such sources are of course primary for art historians seeking to reconstruct Beuys's intention or the genesis of particular works. But critics, too, whether discussing an action, interpreting an installation, or analyzing Beuys's theory of social sculpture, have followed the leads and borrowed the terms provided by the artist himself. "One is almost helpless," Rosalind Krauss bemoaned in 1980, "without the explanations supplied by the artist."[9] This is to say that the contexts by which the works are explained have been the biographical and the art–historical: private history and art history.

The Auschwitz dimension of Beuys's work only becomes visible, however, in the light of a different context: that of major or public history, and in particular the massively traumatic public history of the years from 1933 to 1945. Only by bracketing the distractions of the artist's still-charismatic afterimage and of art world lineages and rivalries do Beuys's avowal and evocation of the Nazi genocide emerge. One needs to look not to the story of the Crimean plane crash or to Beuys's personal wounds and war experiences, but to the shared, publicly available facts and images circulating from that time.[10] Beuys's words alone do not suffice to establish the existence of a project of mourning. Any capacity for a mourning effect will have to be found in the objects and actions themselves. But if one works one's way through Beuys's oeuvre attentive to this dimension, then what I am calling a second project will come compellingly into view. Once it has, it may be impossible to look at Beuys in the same way again.

This is not to imply that the announced project is unimportant or that Beuys's objects do not mean what he and critics after him have said they mean. Uncovering the project of mourning as it is coded into Beuys's art will not negate the established interpretive approaches so much as deepen them. It moreover gives us an explanation for the force of Beuys's major works. At its best, Beuys's material oeuvre—the objects and installations that have outlived the artist himself—retains a power to strike, astonish, and disturb us for which the biographical and art–historical explanations cannot account. In the history of aesthetics, there is a name for these effects: the sublime.

* * *

The general shape of Beuys's biography is well known. Only a few major markers of its chronology need be reviewed here, in order to establish Beuys's position in relation to public history. Born in Krefeld in 1921, Beuys grew up there and in Kleve and was twelve in the year Hitler came to power. After 1936, he belonged to the Hitlerjugend and, after the outbreak of war, was trained as a radioman, gunner, and perhaps pilot for the Luftwaffe. Beuys

flew combat missions on the eastern front and was wounded numerous times. Late in the war he was transferred to a paratroop division on the western front. After incarceration in a British internment camp at war's end, he returned to Kleve and in 1947 began formal studies at the Staatliche Kunstakademie in Düsseldorf. The precise details of Beuys's war career have been the subject of much speculation and dispute.[11] But there is no contesting the fact that Beuys belonged to what some cultural critics have called the "perpetrating generation."

This is to say that as far as we know, he played no direct role in and did not personally benefit from Nazi repression and genocide, but did nothing either to actively resist those. How much Beuys may have known about the genocide at the time, or what options would have been open to a 21-year-old airman in the Luftwaffe, are not yet at issue. Without knowing what Beuys felt or thought about the Nazi regime or the killing centers at the time or in retrospect, it is indisputable that he, like every German veteran of his generation, is marked inescapably by a relation to that catastrophe. It makes no difference at all whether Beuys acknowledged this relation or was even fully aware of it. Nor did that relation change when Beuys became an artist. He remained that, which public history had marked him: a veteran of the military forces of the Nazi regime. Prior to any issues of intention, then, his artistic production necessarily and inescapably relates to the massively traumatic events of that time. Whatever their relation to Beuys's private history may have been, his art actions and objects also relate to the Nazi genocide. Even if they did not refer to Auschwitz at all, they would still, so to speak, refer to Auschwitz. They must, by virtue of the fact that their maker had served in the Luftwaffe while Jews, Gypsies, homosexuals, communists, and others were systematically murdered in Europe.

Reviewing that brutal fact will make some unhappy. But there is no pretending that the situation is otherwise. If I have labored this point, it is because the analysis of Beuys's project of mourning cannot get usefully underway until the relation that a priori structures the historicity of his work has been formulated in the clearest possible language. Having done that, it is clear that what Beuys personally knew, thought, and felt about Auschwitz and to what extent he consciously, deliberately made it a theme of his art are secondary questions that raise further issues. What is plain from the basic fact of his association with the Nazi period, is that we, as spectators and critics, are right to look in his art for such a content. We are justified in asking, are perhaps obligated to ask: what do these objects have to say about Auschwitz?

It can be quickly answered that they say a great deal. Beuys's strategy for evoking and avowing the genocide would become one of indirection. The strongest works function through formal resemblance, material affinity, and allegory, rather than through direct representation or confrontation. But

there were, early on, projects and actions that were explicitly concerned with Auschwitz and its place in public history; some even alluded to the genocide bluntly and provocatively. The analysis of the project of mourning must begin with these works.

* * *

In 1957 and 1958, Beuys participated in the first round of an international competition for a memorial on the site of the Auschwitz–Birkenau killing center, west of Krakow. Although mentions of Beuys's participation in this juried competition can be found in the literature,[12] a fuller picture of the episode has only begun to emerge in the last few years. Two works on paper relating to Beuys's proposal, now in Schloß Moyland, were published with a text by Franz Joseph van der Grinten in 1995.[13] One of those was exhibited with eight more related drawings in Berlin in 1997.[14] Another work on paper and two wooden models can be found in the Beuys Block in Darmstadt.[15] The work on paper—a foldout, panoramic photograph of the Auschwitz camp complex overdrawn by Beuys—was originally part of the application materials for the memorial competition. It is now in the vitrine *Auschwitz Demonstration 1956–1964*, in the company of thirteen other separately titled and dated objects, including a portable stove used by Beuys in his action at the 1964 Festival of New Art in Aachen. In a valuable and insightful essay on this vitrine, Mario Kramer neatly establishes the chronology and relations between these objects and events, thereby clearing up incomplete and sometimes conflicting accounts in the literature.[16]

The juried competition for the Auschwitz memorial was announced in 1957 by an association of Holocaust survivors calling itself the "Comité international d'Auschwitz." The British sculptor Henry Moore chaired the jury, and the Austrian resistance fighter and Auschwitz survivor Hermann Langbein acted as secretary for the committee from Vienna. Beuys was one of 426 artists who submitted proposals before the March 1958 deadline.[17] His design consisted of a series of three elevated geometric forms— "landmarks," Beuys called them[18]—tracing the way from the camp's main entry gate to the site of the gas chambers and crematoria. There, a polished silver bowl-form would have been positioned to catch and reflect the sunlight. The three landmarks, each repeating the same slab-like, asymmetrical quadrangle in diminishing scale and each elevated on two pillars, were meant to function as additional gates along the infamous railway and ramps to the silver "monstrance." According to Kramer, Beuys produced some two-dozen sketches and reworked photographs, in addition to two wooden models and one pewter and zinc model, in the process of developing his proposal.[19]

The Darmstadt vitrine *Auschwitz Demonstration* included sculptural objects acquired by Karl Ströher and was arranged by Beuys in its present configuration in 1968. In addition to the overdrawn fold-out pages from the competition materials already mentioned, the vitrine contains the following objects: a bronze plate, cast from a delicate wood relief; a corroded and discolored metal disc with a blood sausage and sausage fragments tied with string; the two-burner portable stove used in the Aachen action and two cast wax blocks; two straw-filled wooden tubs, one containing a mummified rat or field mouse, the other a manipulated folding carpenter's ruler; a crucifix modeled from clay and an old wafer or biscuit in a shallow soup bowl; a pencil drawing of a wounded or traumatized girl; four rings of shriveled, discolored blood sausage; and a centrally positioned object group consisting of two medicine phials, a third bottle, a pair of sun lamp goggles, and an aluminum tag on a string.[20] Kramer has ably discussed these objects, and Max Reithmann has offered additional insights into the related pieces in the Darmstadt Beuys Block.[21]

Three other early and unambiguous references to the Holocaust complement the objects in *Auschwitz Demonstration*. *Death and the Maiden*, now in the Ludwig Rinn collection, is a 1957 sketch in thinned paint on the back of a manila envelope.[22] The envelope bears two ink stamps, prominently visible to the right of the girl's head: one reads "Comité international d'Auschwitz"; the other, "Hermann Langbein, Wien 10, Weigandhof 5." As Kramer notes, the stamps from the Auschwitz memorial competition mark this watercolor as much more than the recycling of an old art–historical figure. Finally, two spare object groups now in Kassel echo the Last Supper in the Konzentrationslager theme from *Auschwitz Demonstration*. *KZ = Essen 1* and *KZ = Essen 2*, both from 1963, gather together a shallow bowl, a nail brush, a bit of plaster, and a painted tin can.[23]

These pieces, then, represent a consensual core of works for which the Nazi genocide is accepted, for reasons of title or indisputable documentary evidence, as the primary referent. But while the directness of their titles may be unique in Beuys's oeuvre, the strategies by which the objects themselves evoke the catastrophe are not. Working from the linkages and material codes established here, general rules for reading such strategies across the rest of Beuys's oeuvre will soon be drawn. First, though, it is necessary to turn to the portable stove from Beuys's July 1964 action.

* * *

Beuys's part in the Fluxus-inspired Festival of New Art in the Audi-Max at the Technische Hochschule Aachen marks a crucial point in Beuys's emergence as an artist.[24] It is the occasion of the first appearance of his "Life Course/Work Course," the unconventional and ironic textual self-presentation

that would become the basic document of his public persona. And it resulted in the famous Heinrich Riebesehl photograph of Beuys with blood streaming from his nose which, widely published in the press, helped to transform the struggling artist into a media personality. Yet for all its importance, the event is only now emerging from dense confusion. The measure of that confusion can be taken by noting that although the event took place on the twentieth anniversary of the failed July 20 attempt on Hitler's life, the participating artists themselves have publicly disagreed about whether that timing was intentional or accidental.[25]

The event began with a performance by Bazon Brock, which included the repetition, at high volume, of the pre-recorded rhetorical question from Joseph Goebbel's infamous 1943 "Do you want total war?" speech at the Berliner Sportpalast. Reportedly, the predominantly student audience of about 800 immediately became loud and abusive. While Brock was still on stage, Beuys began the first sequence of his action, a progressively distorted piano accompaniment. Beuys ritually revealed and displayed a number of objects that night, but what concerns us here is his use of the portable stove. During the *Kukai* sequence of his action, he activated the stove's two burners and mimed the increasing heat with open hands. By his own account, he then melted some blocks of fat and warmed a zinc *Fat Box*.[26] During another sequence with a felt-wrapped copper staff sometime later, a flask containing acid was knocked over, apparently by audience members who had stormed the stage. One, claiming that his suit had been splattered, attacked Beuys and struck him in the face.

Both the July 20 context of the action and the knee-jerk response of the audience suggest that the melting of fat on the burner was a blunt allusion to the crematoria of the killing centers. Beuys's later inclusion of the stove and two blocks of fat/wax in *Auschwitz Demonstration* confirms this view. In the artist's own self-interpretations, fat and felt are ambiguous, but ultimately benign and redemptive materials. They are inevitably discussed in the literature as the lifesaving substances with which Beuys was rescued by Tartars after the Crimean plane crash—the episode Peter Nisbet has aptly called "The Story."[27] Sculpturally, fat is said to signify its capacity to change its form in response to changes in temperature. The fat corners and boxes, introduced in July of the previous year, enact this passage back and forth between solid and liquid, coldness and warmth, form and formlessness. But it must be said unequivocally that fat first of all refers to the body and to the vulnerability of the body to fire. Beuys could have demonstrated the sculptural principle by simply using wax. There was no need at all to use or name fat and involve the inevitable links to the body. That fat marks not just the body but the body of the holocaustal sacrifice is clear enough, but the implications have not been drawn in the literature.[28]

Felt has an even more specific historical referent that has nothing to do with the plane crash. It is a gruesome and unpleasant fact, but one that is not acknowledged in the published Beuys reception, that after 1942 the hair of the victims was shorn and collected at the killing centers and shipped to German-owned factories, where it was processed into felt.[29] This felt was used for a range of wartime products, including slippers for U-boat crews and stockings for railway workers. Seven tons of human hair, packed and ready for shipment, were discovered at Auschwitz when the camp was liberated in 1945.[30] Whatever Beuys's personal experience of this pressed material may have been and whatever its sculptural properties may be, felt has a place in the history of the Nazi genocide that cannot be erased or avoided.[31]

* * *

By this point it should be clear that a new and reoriented reading of Beuys is both possible and necessary. The darker resonance of felt and fat needs to be read back into the specific deployments of these materials across the whole of Beuys's oeuvre. Both materials were used extensively in Darmstadt. Felt is especially prominent in Room 2, where *Scene from the Stag Hunt* is kept company by felt piles and rolls, empty felt skins and suits, and felt-wrapped rods and angle beams. Near the center of the configured room, *My and My Loved Ones' Abandoned Sleep*, from 1965, is a five-tiered rack bed constructed of crude wooden boards and filled with layered sheets of felt.[32] No one who has walked through the blockhouses of the Auschwitz–Birkenau State Museum will fail to think immediately of the squalid racks where the prisoners of the work brigades slept under thin gray blankets. If felt and copper can function, as Beuys's self-interpretations would have it, as generators or batteries of energy, that energy is not simply benign. Indeed the dominant tone of the Darmstadt installation is that of melancholic desolation.

In Room 5, in which Auschwitz Demonstration is the only titled vitrine, the barrage of glass cases full of groupings of scarred, impoverished, quietly auratic objects powerfully evokes the museum exhibits now on view at the former site of Auschwitz I. There, similar glass cases display similar and even identical objects as evidence of "terrible crimes." Whatever the particular history and significance of the objects in Beuys's vitrines, they must evoke, for anyone who has visited the site of the Auschwitz camp (or even the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, DC), the countless bowls, brushes, leather shoes, suitcases, and plundered personal effects from the so-called Canada warehouses at the killing center.[33] These tokens, each eloquent in its particularity, powerfully evoke their murdered owners through what Kant named "negative presentation": in the presence of these personal traces, the absent victims are called to mind by the very fact of their absence.

Beuys and others after him, like Christian Boltanski, would use this "negative" strategy of evocation to forceful effect, but the direct precedent and model for it have been sitting in the museum at Auschwitz since its establishment in 1947. Beuys's vitrines have been usefully compared to those of anthropological and natural history museums. To our understanding of the Darmstadt "Beuys Block," however, we now need to add the real glass cases of the prison blocks at Oswiecim.

Ranging further, one is struck by the frequency with which Beuys wrapped himself in felt or wore it on his feet in his actions. *DER CHEF/THE CHIEF (Fluxus Song)*, from 1964, and *I Like America and America Likes Me*, from 1974, are only the two best-known examples. Again, the standard interpretation has been that through these gestures Beuys is rehearsing his rescue by Tartars. would suggest that they have as much to do with the old Christian ascetic tradition of donning a hair shirt to mortify the body and atone for sins. This is the sense as well of the famous *Felt Suits* of 1970. And in Block 6 of the museum at Auschwitz, the gray suits of the prisoners are displayed high on the wall, just as Beuys often hung his *Felt Suits*.[34] In his 1978 installation *Hearth II*, in Basel, Beuys piled more than sixty felt suits, most of them worn by members of the "Alti Richtig" club during carnival in the same year, directly on the gallery floor. This gesture, which evokes the mountains of confiscated clothes at the killing centers, reverberates through the whole double installation *Hearth I* (1968–74) and *Hearth II*. For seen in the context of the industrialized genocide, the numerous rods and small wagon of *Hearth I* visually echo the small, wheeled cart on rails that fed the bodies to the ovens in the crematoria. This sense is only reinforced by the German title of Beuys's installation: *Feuerstätte*, which literally means "place or scene of fire."

The full force of *Plight*, the great 1985 felt environment in Paris, can be mapped. There, stacked columns of felt line the walls, floor to ceiling, of the two rooms connected in an "L"-shape. In the dead end of one, a thermometer and an empty chalkboard marked for musical notation are positioned on top of a closed concert piano. The feeling in the silenced rooms is densely funereal and claustrophobic. Ranked along the walls, the felt columns place the two interior spaces under a kind of intense surveillance. This surveillance can now be named as the haunting of victims evoked by negative presentation. In an exhibition display in Block 4 of the Auschwitz–Birkenau State Museum, there is a blown-up photograph taken shortly after the camp was liberated. It shows the seven tons of human hair packed tightly into 293 column-shaped sacks strikingly near in size and form to the felt columns of *Plight*.[35] (The total number of felt columns used by Beuys has been variously given as 284 and 301.[36]) The silenced piano encountered under the relentless gaze of the columns, and under the weight of the thermometer

alluding to the crematoria, asserts the impossibility of human art, even in that most abstract medium of music, to represent this catastrophe for mourning and rememoration.[37] Beuys's piece becomes a staggering allegory of ineffability that responds to Theodor Adorno's famous 1951 dictum: after Auschwitz, no more poetry (CCS 30/34). An art that would offer itself as an object or gesture of mourning, even more the art of a German of Beuys's generation, must refuse both the pleasures of the beautiful and the direct or "positive" forms of traditional representation. It must, like Beuys's art at its strongest, produce its effects according to different rules—those of the sublime. Only an art in that register, an art which evokes and avows, which strikes, hits and hollows, can hope to honor the major trauma of the historical referent. The link between ethics and aesthetics is confirmed in the English title: "plight," as most commentators have remarked, signifies a danger or risk as well as a duty.

* * *

The development of the evocative strategies at work in *Plight* can be traced from numerous other works roughly contemporaneous with *Auschwitz Demonstration* through to their most forceful and effective forms in the major sculptural installations of Beuys's last decade. Here, I can only indicate cursorily some recurrent motifs and vehicles of allusion and negative presentation. Together they constitute the lines of a symbolic and allegorical network that hovers grimly over this body of work.

Fat is shaped, melted, rubbed, flung, and spread across Beuys's oeuvre. The relation to the victims' bodies and the crematoria established in the Aachen action and acknowledged in the Darmstadt vitrine resounds through allusive sculptural forms that generate meaning through visual metaphor and metonymy. In the famous 1963 *Chair with Fat*, the seated human figure which the chair's form so strongly evokes is absent, but reappears stubbornly, in a kind of ghastly afterimage, in and through the wedge of fat Beuys has substituted for it. The mammoth, block-like forms of *Tallow*, cast in Münster and now in Berlin, recall, through several degrees of abstraction, the forms of the trains and unloading ramps of the killing centers. The resemblance emerged from Beuys's configuration of the piece as "Station 23" at the bottom of the spiral in the 1979/80 Guggenheim retrospective. It is clearly, if startlingly, visible in published photographs of the installation, the effect intensified by proximity to *Tram Stop*.[38] And if the familiar fat, felt, and flashlights on sleds of *The Pack (Das Rudel)*[39] have been seen as so many rescue or care packages, they must also be read, as they spill out of the back of the "car of the German people," as the multiplying funeral sleds of the victims themselves, damned to the night and ice of oblivion.

The fires of the crematoria are evoked in numerous objects. The small 1948 bronze *Torso* was combined unmistakably with a 1950 work called *Oven*.[40] Another *Oven*, now in a private collection in Munich, was made in 1970.[41] This direction culminates in the two versions of the installation and object group *Tram Stop*, made for the 1976 Venice Biennale. There, in the German pavilion rededicated with Nazi regalia, in 1938, by Hitler himself, Beuys actually gives us an abstracted model of a functioning killing center. There is the railway to bring the victims, there are the camp buildings dominated by the smokestack, through the opening of which the pained head of the victim is squeezed, exhaled as ash through the dragon's teeth and thrown, as Paul Celan put it, "to a grave on the breezes."[42]

The maidens, girls, stags, and hares which are wounded, hunted or killed repeatedly in Beuys's work constitute a targeted community the fate of which alludes to the wartime genocide. Notably, hare fur is also commonly used to make felt. From the dismembered body of the 1961 teakwood sculpture *Virgin*[43] to the fantastically threatening hare in the rifle sights of a toy soldier in *The Unconquerable*, from 1963,[44] to the famous actions with dead hares, the process by which these symbols of innocence are transformed into hated objects is reenacted. If *Tram Stop* evokes a killing center, *Stag Memorials*, created in the Martin Gropius Bau in Berlin as part of the 1982/83 exhibition "Zeitgeist," recalls the forced labor camps. Around the looming central slagheap, the violent potential of the pliers, hammers, and other hand tools is evinced by the dismembered torso-form of an abstracted female body held in a vise.[45] A spindly wooden pole overlooking the scene sported not a flag but a blood sausage of the type used in the Darmstadt vitrine.[46] The cast bronze and aluminum elements of the spin-off object group *Lightning with Stag in its Glare* relate to the folding carpenter's rule from the same vitrine.[47]

Beuys's ability to find precisely resonant sculptural materials and to embed them in intensely evocative forms and visual allegories is forcefully at work in the four versions of *The End of the Twentieth Century*, from 1983.[48] The manipulated basalt columns evoke the human body by their scale and resemblance to stone sarcophagi and portrait mummies, and they recall disastrous human history by their resemblance to the fallen columns of a ruined classical temple. The funereal piece executed in the traditional medium of rememoration allegorizes the genocidal catastrophe at the same time that it counters the pompous monumentality of traditional history art.

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The first issue posed by a reoriented reading of Beuys concerns the status of what I am calling a project of mourning. As has been noted, confirmation of such a project in Beuys's own words is somewhat slim. In addition to the

1985 Munich address, three statements by the artist can be read as acknowledgment of a project parallel to and bound up with, yet importantly distinct from, the aims expressed by the "expanded concept of art." In a much-cited 1982 interview with Max Reithmann, Beuys asserted that the horror denoted by the place-name Auschwitz cannot be "represented in an image." Thus, he never sought to represent that horror in his art; he rather tried to "remember" it through what he called "its positive counter-image."[49] This notion is far from clear, but can be read as a refusal of direct, positive representations in favor of the negative, oblique, and severe strategies of evocation and avowal advocated by Adorno. However, both Beuys's conclusion that *Auschwitz Demonstration* may therefore be seen as a kind of "toy"[50] and his glib suggestion that consumer capitalism must be seen as a contemporary Auschwitz remain problematic. The latter comment seems to echo aspects of Adorno's critique of the culture industry and universalized exchange value (ND 373/380). But if there is one thing a German veteran of Beuys's generation cannot do, it is to appropriate the critical voice of an exiled Jewish intellectual returned to Frankfurt. Without much more disclosure and elaboration than Beuys provided, such utterances simply subvert the gravity of his other statements.

In earlier discussions with Caroline Tisdall, Beuys again explained that the objects *KZ = Essen* are not meant to "represent catastrophe," but to explore "the content and meaning of catastrophe."[51] He implied that they could function therapeutically, by "healing like with like" in a homeopathic healing process. But here, as elsewhere, there is a rapid and levelling shift to the present tense, with an assertion that "the human condition is Auschwitz." In a less-cited 1980 interview published in *Penthouse*, Beuys acknowledged the deep personal shock that came with his first realization, after the end of the war, of the full extent of the genocide. That shock, he said, "is my primary experience, my fundamental experience, which led me to begin to really go into art."[52] Together, these statements are as near as Beuys was willing to go toward an unambiguous acknowledgment of a project of mourning. In themselves, they would hardly be enough. But as confirmation of what can be read in the objects themselves, they suffice. Indeed, the consistent pattern of visual and material linkages I have pointed to does not need any confirmation at all from the artist: the links are there for anyone to see, trace, and feel. At this point the argument makes contact with an ongoing and still-contested contemporary analysis of the role of artistic intention.

With respect to the problem of intention, we cannot know what Beuys actually felt and believed about Auschwitz. We simply do not have access to such knowledge. Moreover, Beuys himself may not have been able to know or understand his own deepest feelings about the Nazi period. In this sense, Beuys's own words cannot be taken as infallible guides. Given Beuys's status

as a bystander under arms during that period, we would expect that a personal confrontation with it would have been acutely painful. But we cannot know for sure if that confrontation took place or, if it did, how deeply it probed and with what effect. Further, we do not know for certain whether Beuys intentionally coded his objects with references to Auschwitz or whether that coding was largely unconscious. Beyond this, claims by way of answer to these problems devolve into speculation.

What we can say is that the objects do evoke and avow. When viewed in the correct context, they indeed generate such meanings. We can also say that it was entirely possible that Beuys knew of the relevant facts and images pertaining to that context. He may have first encountered them while doing research for his 1958 proposal for an Auschwitz memorial. Kramer has noted that the trial of Auschwitz guards in Frankfurt in 1964 and 1965 had created, at a crucial time in the development of Beuys's art and persona, the first public occasion since the war and the Nuremberg trials, for Germans to confront and discuss among themselves details about the mechanics and logistics of the killing centers.[53] Beuys could at that time have come into contact with additional information about, for example, the use of human hair. He could have been shown or exposed to the relevant images—photos, for example, taken by a visitor to the Auschwitz–Birkenau museum. In the strictest sense, the facts and images had been in public circulation since Nuremberg. One does not need to be an uncritical Freudian (with respect to the unconscious) or a missionary Derridean (with respect to intention and iterability) to realize that Beuys's works could function on some level as objects and gestures of mourning with or without Beuys's clear intention or full apprehension.

There are, then, two possibilities. Beuys may not have grasped how consistently and intensely his objects oriented themselves toward Auschwitz. Though improbable, that would most simply explain the relative paucity of clearer statements from the artist himself. Alternatively, Beuys may have known what he was doing, in which case the pronounced evasiveness of his statements on the subject was no accident. That is, he may have wanted to avoid the association of his art with any too-facile "art about Auschwitz" label. He may have wanted to preserve for the objects and installations an opportunity to have their effects without the interference of such assumptions and expectations. There would have been good reason to do so; the effects of the sublime depend in large part on a certain openness or vulnerability on the part of the spectator. The expectation that one was about to view "Auschwitz art" would have functioned for many as a protective shield or barrier against the hit of the sublime. It would also have blocked any reflection on the "expanded concept of art." That would have been a major concern, since Beuys clearly did not want the spectator's reflection to end

with or come to rest at Auschwitz. The issue is finally undecidable, but if the public evasions in fact reflect Beuys's deliberate strategy, then it must be said that the strategy worked too well. The myriad autobiographical banalities were readily seized on as iconographic certainties, and the "expanded concept of art" construed as the primary content of his work. Auschwitz was moved to the margins, where it has remained.

The question then becomes one of the effectiveness of the project of mourning. Much has been made of the German "inability to mourn." According to Alexander and Margarete Mitscherlich, instead of confronting and working through the narcissistic investments that were mobilized by Nazi fantasies (and without which the genocide would not have been possible), Germans of the perpetrating generation threw themselves into the less painful labor of economic recovery.[54] While there is "truth" to this analysis, anyone who has spent time in contemporary Germany will also recognize it as a problematic, if necessary, generalization. Working through Auschwitz and mourning its victims is a slow, ongoing process that takes place across generations and on many levels. The Slovenian theorist Slavoj Žižek makes the point that the major discursive analyses of Nazism carried out by the Frankfurt School and poststructuralist theorists have focused on the levels of imaginary and symbolic identification, thereby tending to miss the deep, "pre-symbolic enjoyment" activated by the Nazi fantasy. Merely rational critiques of Nazi fantasies of purity and omnipotence are ultimately ineffective insofar as they leave this deeper level of enjoyment untouched. To "go through the fantasy" would only be possible at the end of a movement which first reenacts it, which puts its symbols back into play in order to call back and confront that deepest and most persistent level of support.[55]

Beuys may have intuited something similar, or have been on his way to such an intuition. This may well be what he meant by his talk of a "homeopathic process." And it is in this connection that the idea that a work like *Auschwitz Demonstration* can be thought of as a kind of "toy" should perhaps not be dismissed too quickly. We can, at any rate, observe that after 1964 he avoided the kind of directly confrontational allusions to Auschwitz that are still more likely than not to provoke reflexive and unproductively defensive reactions. Whether he knew it or not, Beuys found a way to evoke and avow the genocide by means of subtler strategies of indirection, opening up the way to what Žižek calls the "traumatic kernel." And as one nears the irreducible kernel of catastrophe, one is exposed to the sharp and disturbing hit of the sublime. An opening for mourning and working through is thereby created. There is no guarantee that Beuys's works will have this effect. One may argue that whatever their potential, the history of Beuys's reception indicates that they did not. I am not so sure. My own experience is that the force of the late installations is quite palpable.

The risk of the sublime is always that its hit may not be followed by an adequate interpretation. An adequate interpretation, in the case of Beuys, would include the patient establishment of links to Auschwitz. That is the task of the critic. Only in the clarity of such links can one grasp Beuys's importance as a postwar European artist at the cutting edge of a new and critical form of history art. With respect to the project of mourning, only through such diligent linking can the "terrible sins, and not-for-describing black marks" be kept in view and not lost sight of "even for a moment."

The greatness of Beuys's work comes from its strong, simultaneous engagement with both the past and the future. The way out of the transgressive and traumatic past becomes the way into a redemptive future. Healing, in Beuys's idiom, enables the creation of a better world. But it is no overstatement to say that the very dignity of Beuys's message of hope hangs upon the struggle and hard work implied in the posture of perpetual remembrance. Without that, the message—in all its ethical and political dimensions—becomes less convincing. If the sins and marks Beuys spoke of seem to have slipped from view in the published reception, the corrective is available. As Beuys seemed to have implied, it may have been too early, even in 1985, to "talk about one's own country" directly, with clear words and place-names. It may have been too early to make the more brutal linkages I have made here. One trusts it is not still so.

* * *

Postscript, September 2003

The decision to include this essay, written in late 1997, in this book was not without misgivings. One travels far in six years. Aside from the usual corrections, some conceptual and theoretical adjustments were unavoidable. While the thematic contribution of this text and its role in the book's constellation will be clear, a certain distance between it and the other essays remains legible. Mainly an exercise in interpretation and commentary, it falls short of a "critique" in Adorno's sense of digging out the moments of "truth" and "untruth" entangled behind the closed monad of the singular work or comprehended artistic oeuvre. We still lack a just and convincing critique of Beuys in this more ambitious sense.

I am if anything more convinced today by the materials-based reading offered here. On two counts, however, my formulations are inadequate. My choice to call the links to Auschwitz a second, unacknowledged project of mourning now seems especially unfortunate. Since we cannot know to what extent such links were intentional and deliberate, they should not have been called a "project"; the term implies a level of intentional control that may

have been missing. But as the essay does make clear, even if the links to Auschwitz were completely unconscious and uncontrolled (which in fact was not the case, as the scattering of direct references shows), those links would not for that be in any way invalidated. Nor would the sublime effects of this work be weakened.

Secondly, while my own experience of the hit of Beuys's late installations is the legitimate and necessary basis for an aesthetic response, the implicit move of attributing, by analogy, similar experiences and responses to German spectators is not justified. This possible gap should have alerted me to the specificities of spectator subject position as a decisive factor bearing on the possibility of any sublime hit. This line of inquiry would have clarified the complexities that bear on subjectivity and condition its disposition to the hit which negative presentation can potentially deliver. Nationality, generation, and personal involvements in or familial memories of the roles of victim, perpetrator, bystander, collaborator, beneficiary, resister, and latecomer are all factors shaping any individual subject's responses to a potential confrontation with the memory or representation of major traumatic history. At the structural level of subject-position alone, then, Germans and Americans, Jews and non-Jews, soldiers and their children will be predisposed to have different responses to works like *Tallow*, *Plight*, or *The End of the Twentieth Century*. The history of the individual, the extent to which the past has already been processed or not, and the specifics of the viewing situation and the context of reception that follows it are all further conditions shaping subjective response.[56]

I would moreover like to acknowledge the justice of some criticisms offered by Benjamin Buchloh in his 1998 response to this essay.[57] Significant divergences remain between Buchloh's Adorno-inspired critical method and the readings of Adorno developed in this book—not the least over the problem of the sublime and the art–historical position of Beuys. I acknowledge, however, that my approach in this essay was too monographical and insufficiently comparative. Beuys was no solitary genius creating in a vacuum; he worked at the intersection of several different national and international contexts of discourse and networks of artistic and political practice. His relations to his European and American peers needed more specification and elaboration, as Buchloh argues. Beuys's responses to the work of Arman and Daniel Spoerri would seem to be especially crucial in the development of specifically sculptural forms for the negative representation of historical trauma. Beyond that, the role of Düsseldorf as a point of entry into Germany for French and American artistic innovations, must be a key to the cultural history of this postwar period. Other keys are the mediating links and disseminational flows between Frankfurt and Düsseldorf and the relative lack of them between Frankfurt and Paris. Certain questions would already

constitute a needed research project. (To what extent was Adorno known and read in Düsseldorf? What were the debates there, following his publications and interventions, and who took part in them? How did artists respond?)

Since this essay was written, I have come across further confirmation of my materials-based interpretation of felt and fat. The most important is the 1955 release of Alain Resnais's film *Nuit et brouillard* (and its German-language adaptation by Paul Celan under the title *Nacht und Nebel*). This documentary account of the Nazi genocide relied on the positive forms of traditional representation. But it contained the images that would become the basis for negative presentation in the visual arts. Of special relevance to readings of Beuys are the film's images of women's hair shorn and collected at the killing centers and images of the rolls of felt—again roughly the size of the pillars in *Plight*—that were manufactured from this hair. The next sequence of images shows "soap" being collected in a pail—"From the bodies," reads the narrator, "one makes soap."—and brick-like bars of soap; Beuys's fat boxes and corners of 1963/64 appear to be belated but precise visual echoes of these images. It seems improbable that Beuys, working on his Auschwitz memorial proposal in 1957, would have missed this film. Such images need not have been consciously remembered, of course; they would have left their deep impressions, to emerge much later in the sculpture.

The release of *Nuit et brouillard* would also have been a crucial event for Parisian artists and artist groups. Shots of property plundered from the victims at the killing centers, all sorted into categories, look now like the visual templates for some of Arman's serial *accumulations* of 1959.[58] These in turn would have been crucial to Beuys's relic-filled vitrines and, later, to Christian Boltanski's "Canada" installations of used clothing beginning in 1988.

If Resnais's film put these images into circulation in postwar European public space, dispensing hits that would be processed later, other public events in Germany would have reinforced their impact. The 1964/65 Frankfurt trials of 21 Auschwitz guards and personnel made public gruesome details about the workings of the killing center. Peter Weiss's 1965 dramatic rendering of the court records includes testimony about both the harvesting and packing of hair and the use of fat.[59] The more these links are confirmed, the more pressing the problem of why they were not picked up in the reception to Beuys in Germany becomes. While more work in this direction is needed, the outlines of a configuration of artists and the emergence of a negative sculptural representation of traumatic history in postwar France and Germany become ever clearer.

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Chapter Three

Ground Zero: Hiroshima Haunts "9/11"

"Ground Zero"

In the wake of the September 11 attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, the spontaneous invocation and rapid popular acceptance of this freighted term mark a specific and potent return of repressed American history. While no critic or analyst has directly confronted this return, the genealogy of the term makes clear that the civilian victims and spectacular destruction of "9/11" triggered an unconscious discursive reenactment of the problem of U.S. guilt for the 300,000, mostly noncombatant victims of the first use of nuclear weapons against the Japanese cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in August 1945.

Within days of the September attacks, the topos "ground zero" was being used in every kind of discourse, popular and official, to refer to the site of the destroyed World Trade Center complex in Manhattan. Mainstream corporate media rapidly took up and disseminated the term. By September 16, even the ostensibly more circumspect *New York Times* had adopted it.[1] Alternative media sources were not necessarily more critical or self-reflective in their use of the term. After September 11, Amy Goodman, the courageous producer of the Pacifica network's Manhattan-based national radio program "Democracy Now," began her daily news shows with the pronouncement: "From ground zero radio, this is Democracy Now." After the bombing of Afghanistan began in October, she included in every broadcast the statement: "New York was the first ground zero, Afghanistan is the second."

The origins of this term, however, unmistakably point elsewhere: to the so-called Manhattan Project and the nuclear bombing of Japan. The *Oxford English Dictionary*, citing the use of the term in a 1946 *New York Times* report on the destroyed city of Hiroshima, defines "ground zero" as "that part of the ground situated immediately under an exploding bomb, especially an atomic one."[2] On first look, the main function of the post–September 11 redeployment of the term was to sanctify the main site of the attacks as

hallowed ground worthy of national memorialization. We might think, then, that the relocation of ground zero from Japan to Manhattan sought to express the depth of American pain and grief. The performative effect of the displacement is to claim for the nation a kind of ultimate victimhood.

Certainly a collective wound is being marked here, but which wound, exactly? The wound of losing 2,830 innocent citizens (and noncitizens)[3] in a spectacular, Hollywood-style attack, or that of seeing the symbols of U.S. postwar and post–Cold War power punctured so effectively? Or is it in fact a more complex narcissistic wound that tracks back from the shock of realizing that "America" is not loved by all to the haunting suspicion that perhaps the use of U.S. power in the world has not matched the moral exceptionalism proclaimed by its rhetoric? What is ultimately at stake in this symptomatic use of language is the moral legitimacy of U.S. hegemony— of the globalization of the economic "war of all against all" under an U.S.-dominated neoliberal world order. Both a desire for vengeance and the fear of what "Infinite Justice" might mean can be detected behind the use of this term.

This is the conclusion that emerges from a cursory analysis of the American public discourse produced in response to September 11. For "ground zero" appeared within a cluster of related terms (from "Pearl Harbor" to the "axis of evil") and as part of a moral register (that of a "crusade" against "evil-doers") that together reconstitute the discourse of World War II. The deliberate resuscitation of this discourse by the George W. Bush administration has been widely recognized in the United States. But while commentators across the political spectrum have noted that the World War II script is the main source for the script of the new "war on terror," few of them have been willing to critically question the earlier script itself. The perennial popularity of this old just war script strongly indicates that most Americans are unwilling to let go of the fantasy of national virtue that animates it. And while members of the Bush government may be personally and by inclination more involved with this script than was Bill Clinton, it is crucial to understand that its popularity is general, rather than partisan.

In official and popular American memory, the World War II has become the "last good war," fought and won by the "best generation." As this generation dies out, a desire to honor its surviving members has found cultural expression in a string of mythifying Hollywood blockbusters from *Saving Private Ryan* to, indeed, *Pearl Harbor*—to say nothing of post–September 11 Hollywood fare. In this light, the revival of the categorical rhetoric of World War II can be read as a collective reach back for the morally unambiguous position of the United States in that conflict. And the folding of this rhetoric into the response to September 11 has been politically effective, if ultimately naive.

For the way in which World War II was concluded in the Pacific poses insuperable problems for the official American account. In a catastrophic ethical and political failure, U.S. leaders committed a crime against humanity for which they have never been held to account and which U.S. citizens have so far avoided confronting. For more than 50 years, American denial of Hiroshima and Nagasaki has been protected by a carefully administered myth according to which the obliteration of those cities and the people who lived in them was a "necessary" action—one that, moreover, actually saved lives by eliminating the need for an invasion of the Japanese main islands. While that myth has been refuted by a large body of recent historical scholarship, it remains "the official story."[4]

A short reminder of the contexts in which the first nuclear weapons were produced and used and in which the official story was constituted through the selection of certain facts and the repression of others, will clarify how Americans managed to forget and deny Hiroshima until the *Enola Gay* controversy of 1995. After Hitler invaded Poland in 1939, physicists Leo Szilard and Albert Einstein warned Franklin Roosevelt that Nazi scientists were working on a terrible new weapon, based on the energy potentially releasable by splitting the atom. After the United States entered the war in 1941, Roosevelt authorized the top-secret Manhattan Project to develop the weapon before the Nazis did so. Given the highest wartime priority, the project recruited hundreds of top physicists and engineers to work at a secret laboratory complex in the desert of New Mexico and to produce weapons-grade uranium and plutonium at specially built plants in Washington and Tennessee.

When Roosevelt died in April 1945, Harry Truman inherited a project that had secretly spent $2 billion from the U.S. war budget and had developed powerful bureaucratic momentum. It would be no exaggeration to say that the legacy of the Manhattan Project included what Dwight Eisenhower would later call the "military–industrial complex," as well as a powerful national security culture organized around a permanent nexus of profit and secrecy. Production of the atomic weapon proceeded with all speed, despite Germany's surrender and the hopeless position of Japan under a tightening naval blockade and continual conventional and incendiary bombardment. It is now clear—thanks to research by Gar Alperovitz, Barton Bernstein, Martin Sherwin, and others—that within the complex of motives and causes bearing on Truman's authorization of nuclear first use, the most decisive was the calculation of top-level advisors that a "demonstration" of the new weapon would secure U.S. dominance of the postwar period and at the same time justify the huge expenditure (thereby avoiding possible Congressional investigations).[5]

All internal objections from scientists within the Manhattan Project and from dissenting members of the "Interim Committee" (set up by Truman to

consider targeting issues and explore possible implications) were brushed aside or parried by bureaucratic maneuvers.[6] Alternatives were proposed and rejected. They included: (1) aggressive diplomacy, (2) a detonation before international witnesses in an unpopulated area, (3) use against a strictly military target, and (4) the issuance of a warning to allow civilian evacuation.

Systemic logic was at work here through bureaucratic imperatives and an apparently sober *Realpolitik* that had already identified the Soviet Union as the postwar enemy of capitalism. By this logic, the acceptance of Japan's surrender before the new bomb had been demonstrated would have been the least advantageous outcome; in truth diplomacy had no chance. The other alternatives were unacceptable because they would have diluted the effect of the demonstration. For the unambiguous point of that demonstration was to terrorize and intimidate—to the maximum degree that the new technology made possible. Not only was the new weapon demonstrated, then, but there was also the willingness to actually use it against a defenseless civilian population. In fact, the uranium-based bomb was used against the inhabitants of Hiroshima just as soon as it was technically possible to do so. Three days later, a different, plutonium-based bomb was "demonstrated" on Nagasaki.

In the global relief and euphoria over war's end, the gravity and implications of these "events" were lost. In that moment, few were inclined to ask critical questions. True to form, the U.S. government took measures to enforce and perpetuate this state of ignorance. Occupation censorship and strict American control over images from the two destroyed Japanese cities blocked any serious consideration of the direct human costs of first use. The publication of unsettling *hibakusha* or survivor accounts, was delayed until after the end of the Tokyo War Crimes Trials in 1948, and a de facto ban on photographic depictions of victims in misery, largely restricted visual representations of Hiroshima to images of unpeopled material ruin.[7] The American public was carefully shielded from images and narratives that might have invited empathy with the victims and thereby have initiated self-critical processes.

American avoidance was not seriously disturbed until John Hersey's "Hiroshima" appeared in the *New Yorker* in late August 1946. This journalistic narrative about the ordeals of six survivors of the bombing evidently reactivated American sensibilities and contributed to a climate in which some intellectuals were no longer restraining themselves from questioning the necessity and morality of the U.S. decision.[8] Hersey's account had followed, by just two months, the July 1 report of the United States Strategic Bombing Survey, which stunningly concluded that the "Hiroshima and Nagasaki atomic bombs did not defeat Japan" and that "certainly prior to 31 December 1945, and in all probability prior to 1 November 1945, Japan

would have surrendered even if the atomic bombs had not been dropped, even if Russia had not entered the war, and even if no invasion had been planned or contemplated."[9]

To nip this critical tendency in the bud, Harvard University president and former Interim Committee member James Conant solicited and oversaw the production and placement of two texts that enacted a major reassertion of the official story first announced by Truman himself. "If the Atomic Bomb Had Not Been Used," by the Massachusetts Institute of Technology/ President and fellow Interim Committee alumnus Karl Compton, appeared in the December 1946 issue of *Atlantic Monthly*. And "The Decision to Use the Atomic Bomb," signed by Henry Stimson, respected elder statesman and Truman's Secretary of War in 1945, came out in the February 1947 issue of *Harper's*. These two texts, and especially the latter, reassured the American public—with carefully controlled rhetoric and the full authority of the establishment—that their leaders had acted with wisdom, humanity, and responsibility. Americans could indulge their sentimental feelings for the victims without worrying themselves over the ethics or politics of first use.[10]

As the Cold War got underway, this early reassertion of the official story rigidified into orthodoxy. In a series of studies published in the 1990s, historian Paul Boyer has shown that the American memory of Hiroshima has fluctuated between remembering, indifference, and motivated forgetting in parallel to the "shifting cycles of activism and quiescence in America's decades-long encounter with the nuclear threat."[11] America's own feeble *Historikerstreit*, or "historians' debate," would not take place until 1995, when controversy erupted around the Smithsonian Institution's plans to exhibit the *Enola Gay*, the aircraft that dropped the first nuclear bomb over Hiroshima, in the National Air and Space Museum on the mall in Washington, DC.

Prior to that fiasco, what J. Samuel Walker has called a "new consensus" among historians had formed around elements of a critique of the official story.[12] The thesis of necessity was demolished. The curators of the planned *Enola Gay* exhibition had created a script that took into account such "revisionist" interpretations of historical evidence and shaped a narrative that would have encouraged visitors to begin a critical process of their own.[13] Even more novel, the emotional vortex of the exhibition, known as "Unit 4: Ground Zero," would have exposed many Americans for the first time to devastating photographs and relics documenting in depth the suffering of civilian victims of the bombing. Well-organized veterans' groups furiously attacked the planned exhibition in the media and by directly lobbying the federal government. By January 1995, acrimonious public debate had been raging on for nine months. But the term "debate" is perhaps misleading; it does not reflect how thoroughly the critics dominated the controversy. More revealing is the fact that the curators, in full retreat, were forced to

revise their exhibition script repeatedly, to satisfy the objections of the Air Force Association and the American Legion. A politically impotent defense mobilized by historians and scholars was too little, too late. The rout ended when 81 members of Congress demanded the firing of Air and Space Museum director Martin Harwit and threatened deep cuts in the Smithsonian's budget if the exhibition was not brought in line with the official myth. On January 30, Harwit announced the cancellation of the exhibition: the *Enola Gay* would be displayed as a heroic relic, accompanied by a single minimalist and uncritical panel of text. On May 2, Harwit resigned.[14]

The shock of this suppression provoked a number of excellent analyses and kick-started the belated writing of the history of American denial of Hiroshima. Robert Jay Lifton and Greg Mitchell's important 1995 study *Hiroshima in America* supplies indispensable psychoanalytic insights. *History Wars*, a 1996 collection of cultural histories edited by Edward T. Linenthal and Tom Engelhardt, convincingly situates the *Enola Gay* censorship within the context of the American debate over the politics of canon formation (popularly known as the "culture wars") at a moment when Republicans, under the aggressive ideological leadership of Newt Gingrich, had just captured the House of Representatives. Readers can evaluate the new historical arguments in *Hiroshima's Shadow*, a weighty but valuable 1998 compendium of documents and essays edited by Kai Bird and Lawrence Lifschultz, and in the academic essays collected by Michael Hogan in the 1996 *Hiroshima in History and Memory*.

This compressed contextual review clarifies what is behind the post–September 11 return of "ground zero." We must assume that the 1995 *Enola Gay* controversy exposed most Americans to the origins of this term. It was undeniably "in the air" at that time. Promptly repressed or forgotten with the end of the controversy, the term was consigned to the unconscious until its reemergence after the September attacks. It seems, then, that Americans are in the grips of that response Freud called "acting-out." They are reenacting an unconscious problem that is made more intense and emotional by their refusal to recognize its source and its repetitive character.

Acting-out may be a necessary stage or moment in the processing of a freighted past, but in this case its effects are not benign. Harry Truman's announcement of the bombing of Hiroshima began by reminding Americans of Pearl Harbor, clearly implying that a just retribution had finally been delivered. Not neglecting to include that invocation of God that has never been missing from American politics, Truman's announcement signaled that the bombings were moreover a form of divine retribution that confirms the special favor and exceptional status Americans have always enjoyed. Elaborating the category of "moral inversion," Lifton and Mitchell have shown how the surprise attack on Pearl Harbor and Japanese outrages in

Nanjing and Bataan were invoked to justify whatever Americans might do to the Japanese in return.[15] Since by their brutality the Japanese had forfeited their humanity, avenging American victims could do as they liked: they themselves would never be guilty of atrocity or crime against humanity, for they had already reduced the enemy, combatants and noncombatants alike, to subhuman status.

In the days after September 11, precisely this moral inversion was reactivated through official invocations of Pearl Harbor and the "evil-doers." And as the bombing of Afghanistan began, Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld confirmed the deep internalization of its logic by excusing the United States *in advance* for any innocent deaths in the new war. "Let there be no doubt," he declared on October 29, 2001, "responsibility for every single casualty in this war, be they innocent Afghans or innocent Americans, rests at the feet of the Taliban and Al Qaeda."[16] The term "ground zero" zips together a discourse that sets up an equivalence between Pearl Harbor and September 11 in order to indulge a popular demand for ferocious vengeance and at the same time justify it with false-moral and false-historical authority.

At this writing, in April 2002, we still do not know how many innocent victims were claimed by an aerial campaign that included the use of cluster bombs which will continue to kill and maim for years and a "thermobaric" bomb that approaches nuclear weapons in horrific effects. Independent estimates, including University of New Hampshire economist Marc Herold's detailed study of corroborated field reports, indicate a figure in the neighborhood of 3,000 Afghani civilian dead.[17] Comparing the numbers of victims in a bid to claim the moral high ground is already a lapse into barbarism. The point is that whatever the number of Afghani casualties, we are ignorant of that number because Afghans are not deemed important enough to confirm and count scrupulously. By contrast, the *New York Times* fastidiously and ostentatiously updates the number of dead from the September 11 attacks *daily*.

These observations in no way justify the atrocities of September 11, of course, or contest the right to self-defense. But they confirm that for all the persistency with which Americans have needed to imagine themselves as the most virtuous people on earth, they remain largely in denial of their own genocidal history. This denial continues to structure U.S. foreign policy and use of force in ways that, at worst, are straightforwardly murderous and, at best, subvert the principles and institutions of international humanitarian law established to restrain the use of violence between and within states.

It is in this context that we must interpret longstanding U.S. resistance to a strong International Criminal Court (ICC) and "universal jurisdiction" provisions for the prosecution of former heads of state and high-level policymakers, indicted for war crimes and crimes against humanity. The Bush

administration's "unsigning" of the treaty authorizing the ICC—coming after its determined subversion of a string of other urgently important treaties, from the Kyoto accords on climate change to the whole structure of interdependent treaties limiting the testing, use, and proliferation of nuclear weapons—openly confirms what was already clear. The right-wing ideologues and militarists now in power have only contempt for international opinion and prefer that the United States dominate other nations without being constrained by the rule of law or international humanitarian standards. The world is on notice. From now on, the U.S. government will only abide by treaties or recognize world opinion when it is convenient or advantageous to do so. The rest of the world will not hesitate to call this the behavior of a rogue state.

What the attacks of September 11 put in danger, then, was not U.S. national survival, but rather that intertwining of domestic naiveté and ignorance so necessary to the American bid to dominate and instrumentalize the supranational structures of global order. The ruling pragmatists who, as a class, are behind the more extreme Bush government understand well that the tightening net of international law and the growing global insistence that those who commit war crimes, atrocities, and genocide be brought to account will sooner or later bring indictments against American policymakers. While Christopher Hitchens has already made the case for prosecuting Henry Kissinger, the specter of Hiroshima opens up a potentially more devastating threat to official American myths.[18] Hence, the attempt to quickly extract from other governments—through a flurry of backroom bribery and bullying—bilateral agreements granting special immunity for U.S. nationals from prosecution at The Hague.

There is no disputing the fact that the Bush administration's efforts to resuscitate the myth of the "Good War" have been successful and popular with the American public. But it is also clear that a nation can only wage a "war on terror" by rigidly denying that it has itself perpetrated terror and atrocity. If working through Hiroshima would be a condition for a needed deflation of American self-perceptions and for a realignment of U.S. foreign policy in the direction of multilateralism, cooperation, and global justice, this task has been set back precisely to the extent that an uncritical and indeed dishonest return to the "Good War" script has entrenched itself since September 11. But deferral will not make the problem go away. The repressed will continue to return until a younger generation of latecomers is able to break an institutionalized pattern of repetition.

This task will not be easy. Today, Americans would rather act out Hiroshima than make any effort to critically process it. Here, there has still not been the slightest official acknowledgment of Hiroshima Day: no admission of guilt or expression of remorse has ever been issued from the

White House. As historian Richard Minear observed in 1995, there is no U.S. Atomic Holocaust Museum on the mall in Washington, DC.[19] Nor is there the foundation of a sustained collective struggle with this issue, led by American artists, writers, and activists, that would have rendered the links between Hiroshima and the response to September 11 visible and thinkable to the general public.

The return of Hiroshima from within this regressive moment of American patriotic excess at least helps us to see that the construction of a robust and durable "post-traditional" cosmopolitanism will not be able to simply leap beyond national constraints, in some fantasy of a brave, wired world of open borders and free markets. Any such radical cosmopolitanism will first have to work through, slowly and painfully, the traumas inscribed in the very structures of national identity. While the juridical notion of human rights—as formulated in the 1948 Universal Declaration and broadcast tirelessly by Amnesty International and other nongovernmental organizations—follows its own universalizing logic and emancipatory energy, it must function within a world system still dominated by the imperatives of nationalism and organized economic interests. The principle of individual responsibility, however problematized by contemporary critical paradigms, remains crucial to any notion of ethical and political "maturity" or "enlightened" subjectivity. But as long as genocidal atrocities are perpetrated in the name of the nation, working-through will remain a collective and even structural, as well as a private, task.

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Chapter Four

Mirroring Evil: Auschwitz, Art and the "War on Terror"

After Auschwitz all culture, and urgent critique along with it, is garbage.
—Theodor W. Adorno

The Holocaust has proven to be an indispensable ideological weapon.
—Norman G. Finkelstein

Two provocative statements: Adorno's damning 1966 judgment, condensing two decades of sustained reflection on the implications of Auschwitz for critical theory and the ethics of aesthetic representation; and Finkelstein's excoriating indictment of Jewish instrumentalization of the Nazi genocide at the end of the century. The confrontation of the first by the second—the painful exposure, that is, of a now dominant ethic of representation to a historical context much changed from that of its origin—would approximate the controversy ignited by "Mirroring Evil: Nazi Imagery/Recent Art," a 2002 exhibition at the Jewish Museum in New York. Including works by thirteen artists—some Jewish, all in their 30s and 40s, from America, Israel, Germany, Poland, France, Austria, and the United Kingdom—the exhibition was bitterly attacked for legitimizing art that treats the Jewish genocide with irreverence and insensitivity.[1] The first cries of protest began months before the exhibition opened. Holocaust survivors and regular supporters of the museum loudly expressed their pain and outrage, and a hundred protestors picketed the exhibition on the opening day. From then on until the close of the exhibition three and half months later, curator Norman Kleeblatt and the museum staff scrambled to limit and control the damage to the institution's public image. The reception from the highbrow Manhattan press, usually quick to defend art from the philistines, was in this case notably sour.

A quick survey of the most provocative pieces that were on view will be enough to establish what triggered the controversy. The show featured two works by American would-be *enfant terrible* Tom Sachs: *Giftgas Giftset* (1998) offers three colorful cans of "designer" Zyclon-B by Chanel, Hermés,

and Tiffany; *Prada Deathcamp* (1998) is a cardboard and wire model of a killing center on a flattened Prada hat box. *LEGO Concentration Camp Set* (1996), by Polish-born Zbigniew Libera, is a collection of display boxes that turns the popular children's building-system into a holocaust toy. London-born Alan Schechner digitally inserted an image of himself holding a can of Diet Coke ("It's the real thing.") into a documentary photograph of emaciated prisoners at Buchenwald. Israeli Roee Rosen's drawings and texts invite us to identify with Eva Braun and participate vicariously in the last meeting of Hitler and his mistress in the Berlin bunker.

Accompanying the exhibition was a catalog comprising contextual essays by six scholars and a preemptive defense of the new work by James Young, the American historian of memorials and counter-monuments, whose support of Peter Eisenman's design finally led the long debate surrounding the Berlin Memorial for the Murdered Jews of Europe to a decision in 1999.[2] Critics were not persuaded. Coverage by the *New York Times*—which included no less than four separate reports on the controversy, a negative editorial, an interview with Sachs, and a guest opinion piece by a former director of the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum—culminated in a scathing review by house-critic Michael Kimmelman. "The strange ritual of the art wars, which exhibitions like this always provoke," he concluded, "is to treat as significant what hardly deserves attention in the first place."[3] "Repugnant," "sheer stupidity," "very sick," "not to be forgiven," raged Hilton Kramer in the *New York Observer*.[4] In a less ungenerous review in the *New Yorker*, Peter Schjeldahl opined that "Over all, the show suggests an emergency ward for toxic narcissism."[5] Barbara Pollack, writing in *Art News*, offered this corrosive judgment: "While the term 'shock value' has been used far too often to dismiss (or worse yet, to censor) contemporary art, it is the only phrase that aptly describes many of the works included in this slim survey show."[6]

The two mainstays of the established art press did not begin to offer a belated answer to these rhetorically deflating barbs until the exhibition was near the end of its run. Art historian Linda Nochlin, writing in *Artforum*, insisted that "Mirroring Evil" was "an uncommonly thoughtful if profoundly disturbing show." Characterizing the exhibition as exemplary of a "postmodern" response to the Holocaust (which she contrasted to "realist" and "modernist" responses), Nochlin dutifully discussed a number of individual works and offered a token criticism of the inclusion of filmed statements by the artists ("counterproductive"). She ended her review with some encouraging words for the beleaguered curator: "Norman Kleeblatt should be proud of what he has done, both in his choice of theme, the objects on view and the highly intelligent catalogue he has produced."[7] Eleanor Heartney, writing in an issue of *Art in America* that did not reach magazine racks until after the exhibition had closed, could already include in her review an overview and

apparently dispassionate discussion of the controversy. In calm, reasonable tones that signaled the return of objective distance, Heartney delivered measured and reassuring judgments of the works in the show (some strong, some weak; some shallow, some deep). She attested to the seriousness of the museum's project, confirmed the impeccable academic credentials of the catalog authors, and proposed that the quality of the questions the exhibition raised was higher, and in the end more important, than the quality of the art. Heartney even managed to formulate the most relevant question of all: "Why did it provoke such controversy?" But her answer glaringly and symptomatically missed the mark. Noting, with "museum spokespeople," that the musical *The Producers* was, during the same months as the exhibition run, "the hottest ticket on Broadway," she concluded: "The response to 'Mirroring Evil' suggests that visual art is held to a different standard."[8]

Several more months would pass before a critic would dare to answer Heartney's question and confront the real stakes of the exhibition. Olav Westphalen, writing in Zurich-based *Parkett*, concluded that "Mirroring Evil" "was a weak" but "by no means a fascist show." It did not so much raise new questions as "reiterate" well-established ones. These questions—about representational taboos, the mobilization of sexual desire in fascist imagery, and the survival of fascist logic in consumer capitalism—have already been the subject of serious theoretical treatment:

> Most of the art in "Mirroring Evil" poses as theory-inspired and critical, yet much of it seems plainly clueless. Neither the use of Nazi material nor the arguments developed, sketchily, around it are new or surprising. What's new is only that works like these are shown in a Jewish institution.

Reflecting on this last thought, Westphalen articulated what no other critic could see or was willing to say: "Perhaps, what's really at stake here is not a discussion of Nazi glamour, but a struggle over conflicting concepts of Jewish identity." Developing that thought, he went on to note that "it would be hard to contemplate 'Mirroring Evil' without thinking of the current hostilities in the Middle East." His concluding paragraph, in which he implicitly fingers the U.S.-led "war on terror" and the intensification of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict in 2002 as the true sources of the exhibition's controversy, is the most penetrating thing to be found in the published reception of the show:

> Historical relativism in regard to the holocaust is unacceptable. At the same time the notion that past suffering exempts anyone from present ethical responsibility is absurd. This goes not only for Israel, but for everybody, including the US. After all, Bush's "War on Terrorism" provided the language for the latest escalation of the Middle East conflict. A long time ago, in his

"Lecture on Nothing" John Cage expressed the hope that some day "America will be just another country. No more, no less." Israel and Palestine too, one might add.[9]

What is at stake in this exhibition can in fact be determined with a high degree of precision. An adequate critical evaluation of the more substantive challenge offered by this art and the event of its exhibition at the Jewish Museum would have to situate both within the still simmering debate on Auschwitz and the ethics of representation initiated by Adorno, on the one hand, and, on the other, within a new post–September 11 politics of global crisis. This essay is not a review of the art included in the exhibition; rather, it is an analysis of the stakes of the controversy that engulfed it.

* * *

Adorno's positions on art after Auschwitz became subtler than the provocation of his first formulation suggests: "to write poetry [*ein Gedicht*] after Auschwitz is barbaric" (CCS 30/34). But while he would qualify and elaborate on this uncompromising, if implicit, prohibition, he did not, as is often claimed, retract it altogether. Instead he shifts his critical focus from a blanket denunciation of post–Auschwitz culture *in toto* to more carefully modulated propositions about aesthetic representations *of* Auschwitz itself.

Adorno published his first formulation in 1951, at the end of "Cultural Criticism and Society," a text that would reach a wider readership four years later as the lead essay of *Prisms*. There Adorno asserts that Auschwitz was the irreversible and unanswerable repudiation of culture's traditional claim to ennoble and improve humanity. The place-name Auschwitz flares up from the last paragraph of this essay as the proof that the fall into barbarism has already taken place, that we continue to live under the same, barbaric social conditions that made Auschwitz possible. In the face of culture's utter failure to change or deliver us, the old exaltation of tradition is forbidden. "Poetry" (*Gedichte*) stands here synecdochically for all traditional forms of high cultural production, with their common assumption of autonomous and enlightened bourgeois subjectivity. What is barbaric after Auschwitz, is to reach back for these traditional forms and to take up traditional practices unreflectively, as if nothing had happened: no renewed or unqualified appeals to culture's old authority. Similar formulations can be found in aphorism 22 of *Minima Moralia* (MM 66–9/43–5). At first, then, Adorno calls into question whether art as such has a right to still exist at all. He is not yet concerned with the different question of how, if at all, Auschwitz should be represented artistically.

He takes up that question in "Commitment," first given as a radio talk in 1962 and included three years later in the third volume of his *Notes to*

Literature. In this essay, largely written against the *littérature engagée* advocated by Jean-Paul Sartre in his 1949 *What Is Literature?*, Adorno reiterates his first formulation: "I do not want to soften my statement that after Auschwitz it is barbaric to go on writing poetry [*Lyrik*]; it expresses, negatively, the impulse that animates committed literature [*Dichtung*]."[10] He nevertheless concedes that art must go on, even after Auschwitz, albeit differently. "The excess of real suffering permits no forgetting."[11] But this same suffering "also demands the continued existence of the very art it forbids."[12] Art will have to find a way to accept and bear this double bind, and Adorno will look for this way in modernist art that insists on art's autonomy rather than in committed art that accepts art's instrumentalization. He then goes on to criticize Schönberg's *The Survivors of Warsaw*, a work that attempts to respond to Auschwitz with modernist musical means. For Adorno even this modernist attempt fails, because it approaches its object too directly. By transforming historical suffering into an "image" and turning victims into a work of art, Schönberg has in this case produced an aesthetic representation that contains, "however distantly, the possibility that pleasure can be squeezed out of it."[13] The ethical claim is that any aesthetic representation of Auschwitz will carry within it this potential for aesthetic pleasure. The mere possibility of such a redeeming transfiguration does injustice to the victims, for it makes the unthinkable appear to make sense. Nor does Adorno endorse a role for committed art, à la Sartre and Bertolt Brecht, within a collective project of *Aufarbeitung der Vergangenheit* ("working-through/critical processing of the past"). Instead he begins to glimpse the possibility for art to represent Auschwitz negatively, in a way that rigorously blocks the extraction of any aesthetic pleasure or redemptive meaning.

As the exemplar of such an art, Adorno would propose Samuel Beckett's *Endgame*. "In art," he observes in an essay written at the same time as "Commitment," "only what has been rendered subjective, what is commensurable with subjectivity, is valid" (TUE 291/250). Because Auschwitz is not assimilable to subjective experience, it can only enter art as a void or absence: "In the act of omission, what is left out survives as something that is avoided, the way consonance survives in atonal harmony" (TUE 289/248). For Adorno, Beckett's achievement is to have evoked the catastrophe by restricting himself to its aftermath and to have emplotted this negative presentation within a formal austerity and dramatic impoverishment that refuses, in the severity of its renunciations, all links to traditional aesthetic pleasure. It is this combination that he finds more effective than a committed art that would approach Auschwitz positively or moralistically:

> Playing with the elements of reality without any mirroring, taking no stand and finding art's happiness in this freedom from prescribed activity, uncovers more than would any partisan unmasking. In silence alone is the name of the

catastrophe to be spoken . . . But laments and complaints [*Klage*] about this must reflect—in the spirit—the fact that laments and complaints themselves are no longer possible. No weeping melts the armor; the only face left is the one whose tears have dried up. This lies at the basis of an artistic method that is denounced as inhuman by those whose humanity has already become an advertisement for inhumanity, even if they are not aware of it. (TUE 290/248–9, translation modified)

This, then, is Adorno's "after-Auschwitz" ethic of representation: only an art the severity of which yields little or nothing to aesthetic pleasure and which at the same time restricts itself to negative and indirect evocations of the catastrophe can negotiate the aporias of culture's predicament in the wake of the Nazi genocide.

Adorno would revisit these issues again in the final sections of the 1966 *Negative Dialectics*, a work that wrestles with the legacy of Auschwitz for contemporary life and thought. Within a densely argued philosophical critique of "pure identity," Adorno alludes directly to his 1951 formulation: "Perennial suffering has as much right to expression as one who is tortured has to scream; thus it may have been wrong [to have claimed] that after Auschwitz no more poems [*kein Gedicht*] may be written" (ND 355/362, translation modified). A careful reading of the context in which this statement is embedded, however, makes it clear, if startling, that the "perennial suffering" is not that of the actual victims of Nazi genocide. It is instead, that of survivors and all of us latecomers who must live under continuing conditions of social barbarism with the knowledge of culture's failure. Adorno had made it clear elsewhere that "the objective social conditions that engendered fascism continue to exist" (WTP 139/98). Reified, post-disaster contemporary life, then, has a right to express its perennial suffering through cultural productions and practices. Again Beckett's *Endgame* is positioned nearby to indicate the way: "Beckett has given us the only fitting reaction to the situation of the concentration camp—a situation he never names, as if an image ban lay over it. What is, is like the concentration camp" (ND 373/380, translation modified). But the impossibility of simply continuing, either out of naiveté or cynicism, traditional high-cultural projects as well as the imperative to acknowledge the extent of the catastrophe of which Auschwitz was only the "first sample," indicate the extreme difficulty of art's double bind. After Auschwitz, "all culture" is obliged to accept the fact that it is "garbage." "Whoever pleads for the preservation of this radically guilty and shabby culture makes himself its accomplice, while whoever refuses culture directly promotes the barbarism which culture revealed itself to be. Not even silence leads out of this circle" (ND 360/367, translation modified).

In the posthumous *Aesthetic Theory* these propositions remain intact. The first sentence of this work confirms that after Auschwitz (and Beckett's

solution notwithstanding) art's very reason for being is still in doubt: "It is self-evident that nothing concerning art is self-evident anymore, not its inner life, not its relation to the world, not even its right to exist" (AT 1/1). Art remains in aporia: to go on is a form of complicity with barbarism, but to fail to go on is even more barbarous. While Adorno was receptive to the tortured poetry of Paul Celan, it is significant that he did not recognize any visual representation of Auschwitz as having successfully negotiated the problems he formulated. It seems he was not open to the possibility that artists such as Joseph Beuys (to name a relevant figure) would be able to develop visual or sculptural analogues to the "negative" sublimity of Beckett and the late Celan. Adorno's rejection of the notion that Auschwitz can ever be mastered or redeemed and his very specific demand that an art that struggles with Auschwitz should refuse positive representation and aesthetic pleasure eventually attained the status of a dominant ethic of representation. Today we can recognize the decade following the mid-1980s as the period in which this ethic came to dominance and was gradually conventionalized. The more general and less rigorous demand that any aesthetic treatment of Auschwitz be handled with high-seriousness, good taste, and a scrupulous respect for the victims and their memory is a popularized legacy of Adorno's reflections that critics such as Susan Sontag have sought to vigorously enforce.

In the 1990s, however, it became clear that a younger generation of artists had begun to push against certain of these dicta. In his recent study *At Memory's Edge*, James Young has proposed that these younger artists are confronting not just traumatic history, but their own "vicarious memory" of it: they explore the processes of memory construction rather than actual historical referents.[14] He reprises this argument in his foreword to the "Mirroring Evil" catalog:

> For a generation of artists and critics born after the Holocaust, the experience of Nazi genocide is necessarily vicarious and hypermediated. They haven't experienced the Holocaust itself but only the event of its being passed down to them. As faithful to their experiences as their parents and grandparents were to theirs in the camps, the artists of this media-saturated generation make their subjects the blessed distance between themselves and the camps, as well as the ubiquitous images of Nazis and the crimes they committed found in commercial mass media. These are their proper subjects, not the events themselves.[15]

This would certainly be one way to understand the disturbing force of some of the work in "Mirroring Evil." In Alan Schechner's *It's the Real Thing—Self-Portrait at Buchenwald* (1993), the gesture of seamlessly inserting himself (an English-born Jew) and a token of hyper-commodification

(the can of Diet Coke) into a 1945 Margaret Bourke-White photograph throws into relief the personal and social distance between the artist and the historical event. The processes and effects of cultural mediation are more convincingly posed in Polish-born Piotr Uklanski's *The Nazis*, a 1998 installation of 166 enlarged stills and publicity shots of admired actors playing Nazi roles in mostly Hollywood films. Not only does this nod to Andy Warhol and Gerhard Richter reiterate the point that the representations of mainstream media and pop-cultural forms are ultimately the most decisive in shaping consciousness, but it lures us into a confrontation with our own identificatory involvements in the celebrity star system. Austrian Elke Krystufek's works offer a feminist critique of Uklanski's installation. Her collages combine images from Uklanski's all-male series with provocatively posed nude self-depictions, both painted and photographed, and fragments of text that comment subversively on the gestures and issues raised by the exhibition. Two linked text fragments specifically invoke both the traditional Jewish image ban and Adorno's after-Auschwitz redaction, only to beat both back with irony: " 'Jews don't like images,' I said, / 'because images are charged'."

The specificity of Krystufek's citation indicates that at least some of these artists are well aware of the history of the ethic of representation they are challenging. But while they are certainly transgressive of that ethic in their willingness to work with extreme images and prurient material, their works are rigorously consistent with other aspects of Adorno's critique. However irreverent and insensitive the art may be to survivors and their memory, it is resolutely anti-redemptory. It refuses to give any sense or meaning to historical genocide. Nor does it allow aesthetic pleasure to be slipped in through the back door. It presents that pleasure straightforwardly, in its most transparently manipulative and problematic form, in order to confront us with the issues of seduction and complicity. Indeed a generous critique of this exhibition, which would need to back itself up with readings of the individual works, would recognize in it a selective attack on the ossification of established conventions of "Holocaust art." For although the limits Adorno imposed were a critical response to new historical conditions after 1945, the rigidification of those limits into a set of blindly followed formulas obscures their own historical specificity and makes it more difficult to test them against the shifting realities of new contemporary conditions.

Other works in the exhibition, using those most dependable avant-garde strategies of displacement and *détournement*, seem to break off pieces of Adorno's critique and pose them in isolation from the ethic of reception of which they were a part. For example, it would be possible to read Tom Sachs's *Prada Deathcamp* as a gesture of enlightened irony that, in unmasking repressed associations entangled in the appeal of a designer brand, insists on the links between reification, "absolute integration," and genocide so forcefully proposed by Adorno himself: "What is, is like the concentration camp." But

Sachs's own explanations do not inspire confidence. His self-presentation in a 2002 interview in the *New York Times Magazine*, is an appalling mixture of unironic naiveté and cynical self-satisfaction.[16] One would have to agree with Olav Westphalen that here we are dealing with a "pose" that is "plainly clueless." To be sure, Sachs is too easy a target. The gesture that needs to be evaluated behind his and Zbigniew Libera's work, is the confrontation of one Adornian thesis (the conditions that made Auschwitz possible survive today and are traceable in the logic and circuits of exchange value) with another (representations of Auschwitz must refuse the pleasures of aesthetic play). This problem is in fact more complicated and difficult than it would first appear. It cannot be posed and answered in the abstract, but would have to be situated within a specific context of reception. The question for this new art is whether in each instance it can justify channeling this malignant energy in order to multiply the impact of its own meanings. Are the meanings generated at the Jewish Museum in 2002, in other words, important enough to justify the offense they potentially give?

However, the problem is not the fact that, as Jewish Museum director Joan Rosenbaum puts it, "these artists dare to invite the viewer into the world of the perpetrators."[17] This position, also argued by Young and other catalog essayists, is unhistorical. For in the history of postwar art about Auschwitz—from the pioneering moves of Beuys, Anselm Kiefer, and Christian Boltanski to more recent work by Art Spiegelman, Jochen Gerz, and David Levinthal—there has always been a tendency to problematize possible subject-positions vis-à-vis genocide in sophisticated and challenging ways. If it were simply a question of a willingness to heuristically "occupy" the perpetrator subject position, then much of the art of "Mirroring Evil" would not have gotten much further than Kiefer's 1969 *Occupations* series and would certainly have fallen far short of Gerz's 1998/99 *Miami Islet* project. As Heraclitus long ago showed, however, there is no pure or simple repetition. Repeating old gestures in new contexts always produces a semantic yield that exceeds that of the original model. The condition of current conventions of "holocaust representation" is an urgent issue today because the cultural politics of such representations have been sucked into a new vortex of real and ferocious violence. And with respect to ethico-aesthetic criteria, the one imperative that could trump or override the demand to respect the feelings of a dwindling number of survivors of Nazi genocide would be the need to resist an instrumentalization of the memory of that historical genocide that mobilizes support for contemporary injustice and atrocity.

* * *

This brings us to the political context that makes "Mirroring Evil" at the Jewish Museum so symbolically explosive at this moment. The tasks of

remembrance and working through the catastrophe of Nazism were undeniable postwar imperatives, even if they fell with varying weights and accents on Jews and non-Jews of different nations and generations. Adorno's works were central to the shaping of a European and American consensus among critical intellectuals, within which an Auschwitz-focused Jewish collective identity could articulate itself and emerge to animate a cultural project of rememoration. From the beginning, this Jewish identity had to confront and resist constant pressures for normalization and forgetting. The institutionalization of the critical and interdisciplinary project of "holocaust studies" is one of its important achievements. It continued to develop in a shifting contemporary context marked by the emergence of some new conditions and cultural phenomena, including the reification of expressions of mourning and remorse into rigid conventions and formal rituals and the organized instrumentalization of victim status. Norman Finkelstein has controversially argued that the 1967 Arab–Israeli War was the point at which Jewish exploitation of the memory of the Nazi genocide emerged as a recognizable strategy for securing moral leverage for the state of Israel. Clearly, we are now at a much more complex and contentious juncture than that of 1966, when Adorno published his *Negative Dialectics*. The polarized reception to the 2000 publication of Finkelstein's *The Holocaust Industry* is itself a symptom of such changes, which do not invalidate Adorno's propositions but underscore the need to historicize and revisit them in the light of our contemporary situation.[18]

Today that situation has been overwhelmed by a new eruption of globalized violence. The expansion and intensification of the economic war of all against all under a new U.S.-led neoliberal world order had already constituted an underlying context of structural barbarism. Against that background, the attacks of September 11, the George W. Bush government's subsequent "war on terror," and the escalation of the conflict between Israel and the stateless Palestinians are the new elements that have colored the controversy surrounding "Mirroring Evil" with specific political resonance.

Today Ariel Sharon continues to justify his Likud-led government's calculated destruction of Palestinian civil society by cynically trumpeting the reductive, self-serving, and untenable formulas by which the Bush administration defines "terror." The violence of Palestinan combatants is the (prior) evil to which the Israeli state, in defense of its citizens, is "forced" to respond with all the means of its vastly superior, U.S.-subsidized military—not even excluding an officially acknowledged policy of assassination that is flagrantly illegal and destructive of international humanitarian law and which reasonable people will be tempted to call "terrorism."[19] As Israel's lobbyists and apologists fall back on indiscriminate accusations of "anti-Semitism" in an attempt to silence global criticism of Sharon's campaign of urbicide in the Occupied

Territories, it is now necessary to state clearly what would not ordinarily need to be said at all: anti-Semitism and criticism of Israeli state policy are not the same thing. Any claim or implication, from whatever quarter, that the two are identical or that Israeli policy cannot be criticized must be vigorously resisted. Ditto for any invocation of the memory of the Nazi genocide and its victims intended or appropriated to justify the brutality that the state of Israel is now using on Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza. Sadly, such claims and invocations had become a shrill and paralyzing feature of American public discourse by the time "Mirroring Evil" opened to the public, and they are unavoidably part of the current cultural context.[20] And to state this is not to justify or offer any excuse at all for the unacceptable suicide bombing of Israeli civilians by Palestinians.

Taking this into account, it becomes clear that much of the outrage and hostility directed at the exhibition is the anxious expression of a desire to suppress challenges to Jewish claims to the moral high ground of ultimate victimhood. In her text for the "Mirroring Evil" catalog, Israeli theorist Sidra DeKoven Ezrahi demonstrates that this "shield of moral immunity" has long been under challenge in Israel itself from critical writers, dramatists, and filmmakers, from Yoram Kaniuk and David Grossman to Dudi Ma'ayan and the Acco Theater, especially after the 1982 Israeli invasion of Lebanon.[21] So it is not surprising that artist Alan Schechner speaks of his own work in these terms: "Throughout my time in Israel, I became acutely aware of how the Holocaust was used to justify some of the unsavory aspects of Israeli policy. I was told more than once how: 'Whatever we do to them (the Palestinians) can never be as bad as what they (the Germans) did to us'."[22] Undeniably, one effect of this "mirroring" art is to visually expose the logic of such moral inversions. While it is clear from Norman Kleeblatt's acknowledgments in the catalog that the planning for "Mirroring Evil" began long before September 11, we might suspect that what exhibition organizers intended to be an obliquely self-critical look at the state of Jewish identity was overwhelmed by a context they could not have foreseen.

Opening in New York, where the void once occupied by the World Trade Center is reverently spoken of as the new "ground zero," "Mirroring Evil" found itself in unexpected proximity to extreme violence. And as many American Jews, traditionally strong supporters of the Democratic Party, were expressing uncharacteristic approval of a Republican administration for its staunch support of Israel and its tough stand against "terrorism," the meanings and messages of this transgressive exhibition were in some quarters unwelcome. Hence the bitter and furious response. For the event of the exhibition at that moment would ultimately have pointed us to a confrontation with what Edward Said has called the "last taboo" of American politics: the demonstrable power of the American Israel Public

Affairs Committee and its associated apparatuses, which by its contributions to structural asymmetries and disproportions of U.S. foreign policy is an obstacle to peace on par with any other today.[23] On May 2, 2002—roughly in the middle, that is, of the three-month period in which "Mirroring Evil" was on exhibition at the Jewish Museum—overwhelming majorities of both houses of the U.S. Congress passed resolutions expressing "unqualified support for Israel in its recent military actions against the Palestinians."[24]

Olav Westphalen was correct in pointing out that the weak reiteration of well-marked theoretical problems—their translation into the visual language of academic conceptual art—can hardly be justified by vague appeal to the museum's mission to "educate" the public. But the public of the Jewish Museum in New York is not just any public. It is a public that enjoys a great deal of power and whose self-critical capacities—at the moment not particularly on display—could make a difference. It could play a role, for example, in reigning in Sharon and demanding an end to the perpetual preemptive "war on terror" now being pursued and promoted by the Bush government. To be realized, such a possibility would require a shift in the balance of elements congealed in Jewish collective identity: a shift from an emphasis on Jewish victimhood to the rediscovery of the best traditions of Jewish critical thought and culture. Such a shift is in fact legible in the catalog and some of the art of "Mirroring Evil." The impulse behind it constitutes what Adorno would have called the "truth" of this exhibition. Regrettably, the signals are that the serious questions posed at the Jewish Museum will be sacrificed to the furies—or to the interests of "Empire."

Chapter Five

Little Glass House of Horrors:
Taking Damien Hirst Seriously

There they are! Where have they come from? They're hanging from the ceiling like clusters of black grapes; the walls are alive with them; they're swirling down across the torchlight and it's their shadows that are hiding your face from me.
— Jean-Paul Sartre, *The Flies*

No one can deny that Damien Hirst worked hard to make his reputation as the leading *enfant terrible* of the so-called yBas. Whatever one thinks of him, Hirst—whose institutional ascension was made a foregone conclusion by the "Young British Artists I" exhibition in the Saatchi Gallery in London a decade ago—does not lack talent, energy, or ambition. His latest provocation, however, was weak and not at all impressive. His stunt of congratulating, on the first year anniversary of September 11, the perpetrators for having created a "visually stunning work of art" backfired and was followed, a week later, by a meek retraction and apology.[1] Hirst's artistic production does contain at least one work of significant disturbance. That work, *A Hundred Years*, from 1990, was again on view at the Kunstmuseum Wolfsburg as part of "Blast to Freeze," a large survey exhibition of twentieth-century British art mounted in the fall of 2002.[2] By his own account, Hirst tackles the big themes of life and death. Given that the attacks of 2001 and the subsequent (and continuing) perpetual preemptive "war on terror" have purportedly reminded us that "the real" can reach us even (or especially) where we believed it had been banished, the time is right to question Hirst's work and its sensational effects. The sublime hits, but the cheap thrill merely bothers. If the difference between the two can be clarified by a close look at his strongest installation—perhaps his only truly strong work to date—then Hirst will have justified the effort of a critical response.

* * *

In his enlightening 1999 study of the social and economic sources and political contexts of Hirst's generation of British artists, Julian Stallabrass

has punctured the hype of a tendency that was widely credited with transforming and revitalizing the London art scene.[3] At this point no serious discussion, and certainly no defense, of this ambitious and aggressively attention-seeking art can avoid Stallabrass's cogent critique. His illumination of the peculiar workings of the British art world is well documented, compellingly argued, and for outsiders indispensable. He, moreover, achieves what remains the rare exception, in even the most sophisticated art criticism. He demonstrates with great clarity how specific economic pressures penetrate and shape the production and reception of ostensibly autonomous art. While I have some reservations about certain of Stallabrass's formulations, particularly when they move from the level of local analysis to more universalizing statements about the relation between high and low culture, I find the main elements of his critique unassailable.

Stallabrass refuses to refer to the tendency in question by the promotional and now-conventional abbreviation "yBa" (or, worse, "YBA"). Instead he proposes the term "high art lite." The ironic bite of this rhetorical deflation comes from its mimicking the practice of the artists in question. Just as they have mined popular and tabloid culture for their subjects and iconography, Stallabrass appropriates the term "lite"—a designator that has migrated into common speech, vulgarized spelling and all, from the advertisement campaigns of soft drink companies. The term also implies that the production and practices of this tendency are not only less than high art but not even art at all: "I hope that ['high art lite'] captures the idea of what I will describe, an art that looks like but is not quite art, that acts as a substitute for art" (p. 2). Stallabrass is well aware that what analytic philosophers still debate as "the conceptual question"—what is art and how do we recognize it?—was long ago answered in practice with reference to institutions and conventions. Later, in a discussion of the public sector components of British art, he returns to this question and its consensual answer. Rejecting as "not quite adequate" the de facto truism that art is whatever the gallery system exhibits, he reminds us that the process of selection begins earlier:

> By far the most successful definition—though still imperfect—is to say that art is something done by those who went to art school. The closed shop operates with remarkable effectiveness, and you will find very, very few artists endorsed by the gallery system, private or public, who have not been through an accredited course. (p. 180)

As Stallabrass points out, Hirst and many of the artists associated with his generation were trained by the same two teachers in the masters program at the University of London's Goldsmiths College (pp. 7–8).

Stallabrass emphasizes three characteristics of the art that came to prominence in London over the course of the 1990s: its "overtly contemporary flavor"; the frequency of its use of popular or "low" cultural material and, closely related to that, its new relation to the mass media; and its translation of the issues and concerns of conceptual art into "visually accessible and spectacular form" (p. 4). In Theodor Adorno's idiom, which Stallabrass does not explicitly make use of but which still looms largely behind all debates about high and low culture, the success of Hirst and his generation would reflect another stage in the penetration and absorption of autonomous art by the "culture industry." Serious, autonomous art and the products of mass culture, as Adorno put it in a much-cited 1936 letter to Walter Benjamin, are "torn halves of an integral freedom, to which however they do not add up."[4] The utopian promise of happiness instantiated negatively in works of art tends toward hermetic inaccessibility and thereby betrays its own promise through an elitism that reproduces the unfreedom and division of labor behind all social domination. On the other hand, the egalitarianism of popular culture is neutralized by the market forces that order and control every aspect of its production, distribution, and reception. According to Adorno, attempts to solve these aporias are bound to fail. As he put it in a 1938 formulation that would fit well in Stallabrass's book: "Between incomprehensibility and inescapability, there is no third way."[5]

The relentlessness with which exchange value colonizes every aspect of daily experience and reconstructs leisure time on the basis of the consumption of commodities and the imperative to adapt results over time in the degradation of subjectivity itself. The formation of that enlightened, autonomous individual who was the ideal spectator of autonomous art is increasingly blocked, and the sphere of activity for those relatively independent and critical subjects that do manage to emerge is more and more restricted. The forms of the culture industry—magazines and pulp fiction, radio and popular music, movies and television—eventually strangle the old utopian promise of a now enfeebled and forcibly integrated autonomous art. Not only the processes of reception and circulation, but the very making of autonomous artworks begins to be compromised by the pressures of this dialectic:

> The development of the culture industry has led to the predominance of the effect, the obvious touch, and the technical detail over the work itself—which once expressed an idea, but was liquidated along with the idea . . . Though concerned exclusively with effects, it crushes their insubordination and makes them subserve the formula, which replaces the work.[6]

Stallabrass's strength is his ability to describe lucidly and in great detail this process that Adorno had perceived so early.

Stallabrass shows how the emergence of "high art lite" was in large part determined by the depression of 1989–91 and its reverberations through the private and public institutions of the British art world. The reemergence of artist-organized exhibitions and the development of at least temporary alternatives to the gallery system coincided with the collapse of the art market and numerous gallery closings in London.[7] While "Freeze," the successful 1988 exhibition put together by Hirst and a group of fellow Goldsmiths students in an empty block of buildings in the Docklands district, was realized just before the depression and resulted in gallery contracts for most of its artists (p. 52), its precedent led Hirst and his peers to develop direct strategies for generating publicity and media attention. These included close relations with the tabloid press and lifestyle magazines, in addition to or even instead of the traditional art press. As Stallabrass notes, such relationships were not one-way streets. In order to earn the interest of the tabloids the new art had to take up tabloid themes. Their readiness to deal with sensational crimes, sports, and gossip is one way in which the new artists are markedly different from the generation that preceded them. The need to be accessible to its new audience, this bridging of high and low, reinforced where it did not produce from scratch a tendency to embed mass content in the cool, contemporary, and well-crafted or fabricated forms of academic conceptual art. The most frequent result was the "one-liner"— a work that could be "read" very quickly and that did not necessarily offer much else by way of aesthetic return.

Two events linked to the recession had enormous consequences for the acceptance and rise to prominence of the new art. "The first was that financial troubles led Charles Saatchi to dispose of his collection of blue-chip British, US and European Art" (p. 5). In 1991 Saatchi's advertising firm lost £64 million, leading him to take a pay cut of 50 percent. In the same year these losses were offset by £10 million raised by art sales. Saatchi responded to these difficulties by changing the focus of his collection. Where before he had concentrated on high-priced established foreign artists like Jeff Koons and Robert Gober, he would now collect "young British artists" whose reputations and exchange value had not yet been established. By buying in bulk and promoting his purchases with exhibitions at his gallery in St. John's Wood, he could effectively make a market for the work of these artists. The series of exhibitions he mounted, beginning in 1992 with "Young British Artists I"—which featured Hirst's famous shark suspended in a tank of formaldehyde as well as the companion piece to *One Hundred Years*— launched many artistic careers and destined many works for the museum. This influence of private institutions on public ones, prepared by the slashing of public funding and a growing reliance on corporate sponsorship during the Thatcher years, becomes utterly transparent with the 1997

exhibition "Sensation: Young British Artists from the Saatchi Collection," mounted by the Royal Academy of Arts (pp. 196–210).[8]

The second recession-related event that contributed to the rise of the new art took place within the public sector itself. In 1990, the Tate Gallery's Turner Prize, an annual award to a living British artist, had to be suspended when Drexel Burnham Lambert, the American firm that had been sponsoring the award, went bankrupt. This led the Tate to refashion the Prize. When the contest resumed in 1991, the prize money had been doubled to £20,000 and the eligibility criteria had been changed to exclude artists older than fifty. To increase the drama and horserace character of the selection, the shortlist was reduced to four. Moreover, the new sponsor of the Prize, Channel 4, targeted a more youthful audience with its "cool and alternative image." In 1989, the average age of the artists nominated for the Prize had been fifty; the average age of the shortlisted artists in 1991, the first year of the reorganized Prize, was thirty (pp. 176–7). Hirst was 27 years old in 1992, when he first made the shortlist, and 30 when he won the Prize in 1995. As Stallabrass shows, the effects of these structural changes tended to reduce the time between an artist's first emergence and full institutional endorsement and to shift the focus from the aesthetic qualities of the work to its suitability for reproduction in the mass media as well as from the work itself to the artist's persona. All of these effects benefited the most sensational and affirmative tendencies of "high art lite" to the exclusion of its more critically reflective and socially responsible tendencies.

That there were such tendencies emerges thanks to the dialectical character of Stallabrass's account. He acknowledges that the "negative" or critical dimension of "high art lite" is to be found in its attack on the complacent elitism of art world institutions and conventions. But the promise of its negation too often devolved into an evasive irony or outright anti-intellectualism that just happened to coincide with the interests of a career. He is unsparing in his criticism of art that, reflecting a "facile postmodernism," tended to present the spectator with dilemmas while simultaneously hiding behind their alleged undecidability. Such ambiguity reflects a refusal on the part of artists to take responsibility for their work. Behind it, Stallabrass correctly points out, is concealed both a vulgarization of high theory and a certain contempt for the "low" audience that is courted and then left to dangle (pp. 201–10). While this critique would certainly apply to the more sensational of the yBas—including Hirst, Marcus Harvey, Tracey Emin, Gavin Turk, Mat Collishaw, and the Chapman brothers—not all of the artists associated with this generation betrayed the critico-utopian impulses traditionally associated with autonomous art. Stallabrass offers sympathetic readings of the more socially responsible work of Gillian Wearing, Fiona Banner, Keith Piper, and Michael Landy, as well as the more self-reflectively

aware institutional critiques of Tomoko Takahashi and the artist groups Bank and Beaconsfield. These are the exceptions, however. In sum Stallabrass finds "in high art lite the aesthetic face of Blairocracy": both the new British artists and New Labour claim to have found a "third way" beyond the double binds with which their predecessors struggled. In its logic and its choices, that way tends toward the affirmation of neoliberalism—the easiest response, to be sure, to the implosion of capitalism's "other" and to the disintegration of the working class as a viable political force (pp. 253–4, 271).

If I must register a few critical reservations, it will be clear enough that they are minor and do not disturb the main elements of Stallabrass's account of the relation between "high art lite" and its social and economic context. While I accept that the high/low problem is constituted by those aporias first formulated by Adorno, I am more open to the possibility that ways beyond them can be opened up by reconceptualizing the problems. These aporias hold for the paradigm of bourgeois art. But some directions in contemporary art practice—especially those collaborative models and experiments Mel Chin calls "catalytic"—are putting strong pressure on that paradigm. Adorno demanded of culture, in general, that it not cease to push beyond the given. But he did not do justice to the possibilities of an art that mutates by pushing beyond the structural conventions of the bourgeois artwork or opus. In fact, moving strongly into the spaces opened up by such mutations may be the only way art can avoid paralysis and the capitulation of total accommodation.

It is of course the case that the high/low divide, reflecting the injustice of the division of labor, will not be overcome in any "true" or durable sense until social transformation eliminates that division of labor itself. But artistic practices that attempt to partially negate that divide by reconnecting with, working on, or intervening into aspects of daily life beyond the reach of art world convention and institution can achieve limited and local liberatory gains. I therefore am troubled by those places in which Stallabrass, going beyond his critique of new British art's specific and opportunistic attempts to escape the old aporias, seems to criticize all efforts to move beyond these aporias as such, as if all such attempts must a priori recoil into false negation and affirmation. To go that far would be to lift Adorno's double binds out of history and turn them into essentialist invariables that foreclose in advance the possibility of unforeseen transformations or mutations in art's social roles.

For example, Stallabrass emphasizes that in the masters program at Goldsmiths "the divisions between different media (painting, sculpture, printmaking, and so on) had been abolished and students were encouraged to make specific interventions in an art scene of which they were to acquire

extensive and detailed knowledge" (p. 7). He thus seems to imply that inter-disciplinarity per se is part of the problem. If so, I would disagree on two counts. First, interdisciplinarity itself—at least in the humanities, where it is an attempt to respond more adequately to social complexity—reflects a critique of the division of knowledge into its areas of specialty competence. Behind this critique—and critical theory as Adorno developed it explicitly acknowledges as much—lies a more basic critique of the division between manual and intellectual labor.[9] Art has always been an opening to a social practice that refuses this division by gesturing beyond it in its own practices. The refusal to fetishize traditional media in art school is in this regard a much needed institutional reform. I would argue further that in the long run such a refusal constitutes a precondition for loosening the institutionalized grip of what Herbert Marcuse called "affirmative culture."[10] Second, that interdisciplinarity does not necessarily mean the utter loss of specialist competencies is confirmed by the production of "high art lite" itself: whatever may be its shortcomings, the lack of "high production values" or painterly craft does not seem to be one of them. It could be argued that in general the technical and material quality of the new work is far stronger than its conceptual dimension. Interdisciplinarity of course cannot simply undo the divisions of labor and thought, or jump around them as if they weren't there. But it can at least mark those divisions as signs of reification and develop reflective practices for penetrating them—modeled, perhaps, on what Jürgen Habermas called the "differentiated re-linking" of autonomous spheres.[11]

Similarly, Stallabrass seems in places to move from a critique of the results of particular forms of "high art lite" role-shifting ("for Hirst there is no distinction between making art, curating exhibitions and making video or films" [p. 30]) to a rejection of role-shifting as such:

> The accessibility of material drawn from mass culture became an important feature of the work; specialist knowledge, not only of cultural theory but also of art-history and curating, was to be rejected . . . The use of mass culture is more than an enthusiasm for the vulgar; it is an anti-elitist strategy that runs alongside showing art outside conventional gallery spaces. The effect of the new art and its form of display was a decided shift of power away from art-world professionals in the public sector (institutional curators and academic writers) to the artists themselves, their dealers, freelance curators and the mass media. (p. 60)

Thus Stallabrass seems to imply that all attempts to escape the confines of discipline, role, and specialization—in short, the divisions of labor and knowledge themselves—must end in concessions of autonomy to capital. He argues that to simultaneously address diverse audiences ultimately

undermines art's autonomy: "It breaks the hold of professional standards, of high theory over high art, but does so at the expense of a new powerlessness" (p. 65). All this I find overstated. I am more optimistic than Stallabrass, if I have read him correctly and am not giving too much accent to one side of a more dialectical position, that artists will find ways to test and subvert the divisions of labor and knowledge while at the same time evading the corruptions of the market. Whether such efforts can link up successfully to a larger project of social transformation is another matter, but is one that, in the absence of any strong and effective movement for such a change, is beyond any artist's control.

Finally Stallabrass links this defense of specialist and high theoretical standards to a critique of the bad influence of "postmodernism," in a way that tends to make a scapegoat of recent French theory:

> If the postmodern period has evolved an area of expression in which its character is most fully revealed, it is less in art or even architecture than in "theory," a playful but deeply skeptical melding of philosophy with literary and cultural theory, grouped about the work of a constellation of European stars and their US interpreters. From that strange and contradictory mix, and despite its origins in radically anti-rationalist if not fascistic thought, emerged standard views about the relativism of all knowledge, the inescapability of the cultural and the rhetorical, and of the imbrication of power and knowledge; all loosely attached to an ethics that somehow supported those causes dear to liberal opinion. (pp. 84–5)

These "standard views"—as the dumbed-down secondary redactions of more complex, if not less problematic, French originals—dominated the art world "for a brief period from the mid 1980s to the early 1990s." Taking their cues from the artist pair Gilbert and George, "high art lite" figures like Hirst accepted the standard skepticism and relativism, but threw out both the remnants of liberal social and political commitments and the earlier commitment to high theory itself. Predictably, the result was a new and opportunistic cynicism protected by a pose of "low" vulgarity that dismissed critico-theoretical labor as mere intellectual snobbery.[12] While I share Stallabrass's evaluation of how "high art lite" concocted its deplorable streak of anti-intellectualism, I have to reject his characterization of French theory. His criticism of "theory" and those who abuse it—all rolled together into a problematic category labeled "postmodernism"—is typical of a certain more classically and economically oriented Marxist writing. But the tendency it reflects is, even with its qualifications, far too crude and undiscriminating. Post-1968 French theory—so-called poststructuralism—is not monolithic, and the fact that many of its figures were fierce and politically active anti-capitalists, who remained (or remain) unreconciled with its

current neoliberal formation is too easily forgotten. One of those figures, as we will see, had already foreseen and criticized those tendencies Stallabrass calls "high art lite"—and in terms not so far from Stallabrass's own. The generation that followed the poststructuralists in Paris—the media-savvy and much more accommodationist "New Philosophers"—would seem to be a more appropriate target for Stallabrass's frustration. If these differences aren't well understood by graduates of British art schools, that's not the fault of the French.

* * *

We have seen, then, that if Damien Hirst is a provocateur, he is a remarkably well-adjusted and rewarded one. As Stallabrass observes, Hirst's trajectory—from art school at Goldsmiths to the 1988 self-organized "Freeze" exhibition in Docklands, to exhibitions in the Saatchi Gallery and the Institute of Contemporary Art in 1992, to the Turner Prize in 1995 and the canonization of the yBas at the Royal Academy in 1997—is complete (p. 30). The groundbreaker for his generation, Hirst remains the most prominent and powerful figure of "high art lite." His self-presentation, disseminated primarily through published interviews and photographs, is that of a maverick and obscenity-spitting perfectionist who is obsessed with the "big" themes of life and death; a clownish, primitive, boyish figure who is nevertheless a grimly tenacious artist who will overcome any obstacle to materially realize the dark stuff of his imagination. Hirst, his advocates contend, forces us to look at issues we would rather avoid: mortality, sickness, decay. Stallabrass scornfully dismisses such readings as "facile life-and-death nonsense" (p. 25). While he is best known for his shark and bisected animals in tanks of formaldehyde, Hirst's spin paintings, unique works produced by the dozens by assistants, have been the steady source of a considerable personal income. Of course, success and wealth do not auto-matically disqualify an artistic production: while institutional integration is a valid measure of Hirst's domestication, critical *ressentiment* as such is irrelevant. What is relevant is that in all of Hirst's production, one work stands out—for its force and as the condensation of problems of a more than passing interest.

In 1989, Hirst produced a preparatory drawing for a large vitrine-based work called *A Thousand Years*.[13] The work was realized in the following year, in two versions. The second version, titled *A Hundred Years*, was purchased by the Kunstmuseum Wolfsburg in 1997, following its exhibition there as part of the 1996 yBa group show "Full House," and was again on view in the fall of 2002, as part of the museum's mammoth survey exhibition of twentieth-century British art, "Blast to Freeze." The work, both versions, is

a glass-walled room of two compartments: a freestanding monumental sculpture rather than an installation in the strict sense. In the first compartment, a breeding box—in the form of a white cube perforated by a small number of saucer-sized circular holes—is the basis for the production of house flies on an industrial scale. Hundreds of them are buzzing and crawling all over inside the first chamber. Two circular openings in the glass dividing-wall allow the most active and persistent flies to pass into the second compartment, in the middle of which Hirst has hung a "fly-killer." An electrical current running through a grid of metal wires "zaps" any fly that lands on it, with an audible and impressive blue flash. The voltage does not kill most of the flies outright, however. Wounded, they drop to the catch-basin below the trap, where they writhe and flop before finally coming to rest. All the workings of this chamber of horrors worthy of Kafka are exposed and transparent. As spectators, we watch it all happen in real time just on the other side of the clear glass walls.

Other than the title, the main difference between the two versions is that *A Thousand Years* originally included a rotting cow's head on the floor below the electric flytrap. It was shown in "Gambler," a 1990 group show organized by Hirst, Carl Freedman, and Billie Sellman in a defunct factory building in Docklands. Reportedly, the stench drove spectators out of the room in which the piece was installed.[14] It didn't drive Charles Saatchi away, though. He bought the work and showed it in his gallery in the 1992 exhibition "Young British Artists I," the first of a series showcasing artists from Hirst's generation. But with one crucial change: the cow's head was now replaced by a simulation smeared with dog food, blood, ketchup, and mayonnaise. Apparently the change brought the smell to within tolerable limits.[15] In the cow's head we would have to recognize the rebellious gesture of a bad boy. Blood and guts in an art context are not unprecedented, of course. From the Vienna Actionists to Peter Greenaway, many are the artists who have been interested in exploring "the abject" such materials conjure. To place a rotting cow's head in a closed gallery space and expose spectators to a stench that would undoubtedly cling and linger for a long time after, is a radicalization of an established theme. To be sure, the gesture has force. Francis Bacon reportedly stood mesmerized for an hour before the installation in the Saatchi Gallery.[16] Even Stallabrass concedes that, of all the work in the 1997 "Sensation" exhibition, *A Thousand Years* most embodied the subversive "negative impulse" of "high art lite": "Even the [Royal] Academy could not tame it—the stink of the rotting head induced nausea, and its flies escaped to settle on other works or dwell in [Tracey] Emin's tent" (p. 213).

My problem with the cow's head is not its juvenile pseudo-radicality, although Saatchi's insistence on the use of a simulation is a nice allegory of how easily such gestures are domesticated. In the context of Hirst's

construction, the head is a superfluous element that distracts from the work's considerable conceptual force. My objection is not the hostility a minimalist purism harbors for theatricality: the flies are quite theatrical enough. The force of the cow's head, which in the end would have to be dismissed as an impotent provocation, rather distracts one from the more subversive and problematic force of the main idea: to bring into the gallery a whole "life cycle," as Hirst puts it.[17] Rotting or not, a cow's head is after all a found object, and signing it à la Duchamp is at this point in time of little interest. Nor would the use of live animals break any new ground. We could think of Hans Haacke's hatching chickens, Joseph Beuys's interactions with a semi-wild coyote, or Jannis Kounellis's use of horses. But to construct a state of affairs that, literally, brings real flies into being only in order to kill them does, it must be said, introduce a new set of problems.[18] These problems, presented most forcefully in the only seemingly tamer Wolfsburg version of the work, call for a dialectical critique.

Materially, what Hirst confronts us with here is a structure that produces, contains, and destroys life. In other words, he shows us a status quo, a blind machine for social reproduction—in Adorno's idiom, a "social given." In rigorously modeling the perennial suffering of a structural barbarism, Hirst forcefully poses the problem of domination as such. We would need to avoid being deceived by the apparent naturalism of the piece, for the conditions it brings into being are entirely artificial. This is to say that what the installation constructs and potentially renders transparent is not the workings of nature itself but is what Marxists, since Lukács, call "second nature": the reification of social conditions in the realm of experience to the point at which their historical character is concealed. Having clarified what we could call the allegorical structure of the piece, it would be easy enough to interpret that structure with various accents. The most obvious response to the sudden revelation of a social order would be to read that order narratively as a metaphor for our own social order: we are *like* those flies. The model shows us, we could say, our own fate under the rule of exchange value. Capitalism as the miserable, ever-changing repetition of the always-the-same. The imperatives of self-preservation under conditions of (economic) competition lead us to renounce the promise of happiness and adapt to, rather than change, the structural barbarism that constrains us. In acquiescing to brutality as such, we submit to self-brutalization. As in the paradoxical dialectic of enlightenment, self-preservation ends in the blue flash of self-destruction. In so far as Hirst's absurdist dystopia reflects—"negatively" and however feebly— utopia as a blocked promise, its gesture is one of protest. This is what Adorno would have called the "truth" of the work.

But such a reading runs into trouble. For the flies did not produce their social constraints and do not have the option of collectively transforming

them. The more we know about Hirst and his context, the more we would have to read his model as an affirmation of perennial suffering and a gleeful celebration of those few flies which, like Hirst himself, are strong and clever enough to escape their glass constraints and spread mayhem through the galleries. The more problematic "untruth" of the installation results from Hirst's refusal of the mediating layers of representation. His allegory of tortured flies is too nakedly direct. Their misery is not represented: it is reproduced and actualized. The allegory collapses into the literal. The sheer positivism of empirical fact ends here by annihilating aesthetic semblance altogether. In this sense Hirst's own comment about the piece is accurate: "I somehow started at the end."[19] It is not, then, that this work excludes critical moments or meanings. But whatever empowering "truth" this art could speak to us is overwhelmed by the cynically barbarous gesture of actualizing and aestheticizing real suffering. The animal rights activist who reasserted his own integrity by bringing a lawsuit against Gijs van Tuyl, the director of the Kunstmuseum Wolfsburg for exhibiting *A Hundred Years*, only unwittingly fell into Hirst's trap: while no lawsuit can change the social and cultural conditions that make it possible for barbarism to legitimately enter the museum as a work of art, the legal action will, successful or not, add to the artist's fame.[20] Art shares in the guilt of society, but the unnecessary reproduction of barbarism degrades the problem of justice into one more scandalous self-advertisement. This, finally, is the meaning of the work: the gap between art's utopian promise and its impotence was only something to sneer at. Art's old howl of protest ends here in a snigger and a shrug.

This critique of Hirst's installation has so far avoided the problem of the feelings this particular work provokes. Far from irrelevant, this problem is in fact the proper concern of aesthetics. Critique deals with a work at the level of meaning and social effects. The feelings triggered by a work qua object of *aesthesis* are a subjective effect, distinct yet inseparable from ethico-political meaning and social or intersubjective function. The riddle of relating these two levels of reception has haunted bourgeois aesthetics since it emerged as a new discipline in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The problem is that feelings don't interpret themselves: they are bodily events that call out for meaning and usually satisfy themselves with those that can be found closest to hand. This is to say that what we do and where we go with the feelings a work provokes often depends on the conditions in which we see or encounter it and on what happens afterward. It is also to say that nothing guarantees that feelings will be carried beyond themselves and articulated within an adequate or responsible critical process. Hence the persistent suspicion of feelings in much Marxist criticism: they are undependable as initiators of enlightening critique.

Such suspicions are misplaced, however. Feelings remain an irreducible aesthetic fact: they are part of aesthetic experience, bound up with and yet not identical or reducible to the conceptual deployments of rational or consciously intentional responses. To be sure, feelings are never unmediated or without predisposition—especially in the case of the sublime. But they are, nevertheless, distinct from and generally prior to the articulation of any ratio-critical reception. To say so is not to reassert some version of Kantian "disinterest," modernist "conviction," or some claim about the primacy of pure intuition. No, the fact that social and historical factors always bear on the feelings with which reception begins means that in cases where those feelings are particularly emphatic or widely expressed, a critical response needs to understand them. It needs to try to uncover and trace the social and ideological mediations that not only made such feelings possible but may also have shaped and determined them. To do that it is necessary to start with the work and the feelings it triggers and from there link out to the historical contexts that influence the forms of subjectivity and spectatorship. Bracketing those feelings as irrelevant or dismissing them as "projection" won't do. Making the right links, though, is no simple matter either. All one can do with one's own feelings is to try to articulate and testify to them. This at least submits them for review, testing, and criticism by others. One can go on to trace one's feelings to their specific sources in the work and, from there, try to link them to the external mediations that seem to have shaped them. Doing so is a risk, of course, but that's the risk of aesthetics itself. Declaring our investments—or trying to, for Freud has taught us that they are so often obscure to us—is a way of making the process collective, in order to let it become fully critical. Feelings, then, mark the subjective beginnings of a response that is only fully developed and realized through a collective process of sharing and discourse. This process does not always live up to the utopian promise implicit in Habermas's idea of unforced communication, of course. And sometimes the reasons for its failure are bound up with an incomplete critical reflection on the causes and conditions of the strong feelings artworks can trigger. But however blocked a context of reception may be, feelings cannot be blamed for the failure of critics to be adequate to them.

Viewing *A Hundred Years* in Wolfsburg in September 2002, on the crowded opening night of "Blast to Freeze," I felt a rush of contradictory feelings that were and remain difficult to sort out: horror, disgust, indignation, anger, sadness. Was this the hit of the sublime, or just the *frisson* of the ridiculous?[21] Shuffling through what I found to be a tiresome and over-weight survey exhibition, relieved only rarely by a surprise, delight, or conundrum, I passed into the final section of the exhibition already looking forward to reach the crisp, cool air outside. And there, suddenly, was Rachel

Whiteread's *Ghost*—the pale and patined cast of a small room—a powerful and melancholic presence that somehow managed to overcome the too-cramped space in which it was installed and the miserable viewing conditions of the crowded exhibition. Moving on to the next and final gallery, there was Hirst's little glass house of horrors. The fascination of this piece is undeniable, but it seemed to force the spectator to choose between giving in to that fascination and refusing it outright. One could stay and watch, or immediately leave, one or the other. Indifference did not, at least initially, seem to be an option. I stayed, and what I saw did not please me.

The glass construction of *A Hundred Years* is such that three spectacles are simultaneously on offer, like so many lures for the gaze. One sees first of all the theater of what happens inside the work: the restless activity of the flies, punctuated every minute or so by the blue spark of the fly-killer. Secondly one sees, through the glass walls, the other spectators and their reactions. Finally one sees oneself, reflected in the pane of the nearest glass wall. As I watched the flies, a group of two couples, heterosexual thirty-somethings, gathered opposite me, on the other side of the piece. I became interested in their responses. Quite clearly, the piece brought out a sadistic streak in the two men. They soon let themselves go, roaring cheers when-ever a fly was electrocuted. Eventually, the women, too, began to smile. At that point, I noticed my own reflection and left in disgust. Now, it is not often that a work of art can trigger such forceful responses. But that in itself is no achievement: any Hollywood thriller or roller coaster can pull our strings more impressively. The question, the problem, of this work is: what is it doing here in a museum? What, exactly, is it *doing*? At the end of this exhausting exhibition, it provided the needed relief in the form of regres-sion. I suspect the sadistic enjoyment of the fly-killer was an expression of displaced hostility to culture itself. If so, it probably did no more than mirror the hostility of the artist who made the work. There is "truth" in such hostility, in so far as affirmative culture has until now helped to stabi-lize the systematic misery of the status quo. But as even Adorno at his most intransigent acknowledged, there is "untruth" and barbarism in such hostility as well.

Hirst's installation would have to be contrasted with a project like Jochen Gerz's 1998/99 *Miami Islet*.[22] Gerz asked spectators to bring an empty bottle to the Kunstmuseum Thurgau/Kartause Ittingen in Switzerland. There, they were invited to cross, one at a time, to the other side of a dark room and hurl the bottle against the wall. Gerz carefully constructed conditions in which members of the public could recognize and confront their own capacities for violence. The bodily experience of the ambiguity of ethical choice in a radically unfamiliar situation, heightened by darkness, invisibility, and uncertainty about the results, critically exposes

the fact that the conditions by which people accept and participate in official violence are historical and thus reproducible. In Hirst's piece, by contrast, all reflective links to daily practice are suppressed. In that, it functions just like any piece of popular entertainment. The choice posed, between fascination and a moralizing indignation, is a false one, for it ends in indifference just the same: when the spectator finally gets bored, he or she moves on, nothing more.

We could imagine situations that could possibly predispose a different kind of reception. For example, installing the piece before the doors of the Parliament on the eve of an important vote, in order to intensify public debate about the effects of privatization. The piece would have done better as part of "Mirroring Evil: Nazi Imagery/Recent Art," the exhibition that ignited controversy in the spring of 2002 at the Jewish Museum in New York. It presented work by international artists who deliberately tested the now-ossifying conventions of Adorno's "after Auschwitz" ethic of representation. Hirst was not included, but one artist, Austrian Elke Krystufek, aimed an ironic barb at him. A text fragment in her collage series reads: "You can't shock us, Damien. That's because you haven't based an entire exhibition on pictures of Nazis."[23] But the bottom line is: Hirst doesn't need to use Nazi imagery. He gives us barbarism straight up—as undiluted *facta bruta*.

* * *

At the end of his 1984 essay "The Sublime and the Avant-Garde," Jean-François Lyotard attempted to theorize the difference between a cheap thrill and the hit of the sublime. Discussing the "collusion between capital and the avant-garde" in terms that seem to perfectly foresee and describe the tendency Stallabrass criticizes as "high art lite," Lyotard observes that cultural skepticism is intensified by the art market:

> The force of skepticism and even of destruction that capitalism has brought into play, and that Marx never ceased analyzing and identifying, in some way encourages among artists a mistrust of established rules and a willingness to experiment with means of expression, with styles, with ever-new materials. (TI 106)

But innovation, the new, "what happens" is not the same as the *now* of the sublime, which for Lyotard appears as the question *Is it happening?*:

> It is understandable that the art market, subject like all markets to the rule of the new, can exert a kind of seduction on artists. This attraction is not due to corruption alone. It exerts itself thanks to a confusion between innovation and the *Ereignis*, a confusion maintained by the temporality specific to contemporary capitalism. (TI 106)

This temporality is one of increasing acceleration and instantaneity. It is shaped and dominated by information, that "short-lived element" of purely instrumental value that market actors use to guide their buying and selling. The noise of bits of information ceaselessly replacing their predecessors increasingly fills the space in which, formerly, subjective experience was reflected, shared, and rendered collective.

Under such conditions it is easy for artists, "advised by intermediaries—the diffusers of cultural merchandise," to confuse artistic innovation with the refusal or elimination of meaning:

> The secret of an artistic success, like that of a commercial success, resides in the balance between what is surprising and what is "well-known," between information and code. This is how innovation in art operates: one re-uses formulae confirmed by previous success, one throws them off balance by combining them with other, in principle incompatible formulae, by amalgamations, quotations, ornamentations, pastiche. One can go as far as kitsch or the grotesque. One flatters the "taste" of a public that can have no taste, and the eclecticism or a sensibility enfeebled by the multiplication of available forms and objects. In this way one thinks one is expressing the spirit of the times, whereas one is merely reflecting the spirit of the market. (TI 106)

And yet, the enigma of the sublime persists: "The occurrence, the *Ereignis*, has nothing to do with the *petit frisson*, the cheap thrill, the profitable pathos, that accompanies innovation" (Ibid.). The hit of the sublime, to redescribe Lyotard's distinction in a more explicitly psychoanalytic register, is a trauma that disturbs our immersion in noise and instantaneity. It is the disturbance of real questions, in which everything—who we are and how we live together—is still at stake. Anything less is the illusion of disturbance.

Chapter Six

Blasted Moments: Remarking a Hiroshima Image

What manifests for me now, this January 2002, what gets in my way and confronts me in this historical moment, is an image of a blasted wristwatch.

We know that images and representations are deeply involved in the production of collective memory and identity. Walter Benjamin has taught us to see images as sites in which the struggles between the victors and vanquished of history break out anew in flashing dialectics. In a more Foucauldian register, we have learned to read images as sites of contestation between the administrators of "official narratives" and the makers of "counter-memory." We are less certain, however, about how images actually accomplish the cultural and political work they do. Consensus quickly breaks down, for example, when we try to specify the roles images play in processing traumatic history. Are they signs of repression or vehicles of consciously produced meaning, markers of "acting-out" or of "working-through"? Must they be critically emptied of affect or is their capacity to bear projected feeling an irreducible part of their function? If we accept that the links between certain kinds of images and the feelings they trigger belong irreducibly to their cultural meaning, then traditional aesthetic categories might still have something to offer critical practices of interpretation. But such categories would have to be opened up to history and politics and put back into motion within the specifics of contemporary situations. And this rethinking of categories would need to proceed from immersion in images as singularities that are both reduced to and stubbornly exceed their social functions. If the moments of a hit could be tracked back to their aesthetic triggers and plotted within their social force field, more light would be thrown on the enigma of how images do what they do.

This particular image, this photograph of a relic, poses itself as an urgent problem for me just now, as a declared "war on terror" threatens to undo an international legal system ostensibly based on the rejection of war. It confronts me with an indictment from which I, as the bearer of a national

identity, will not be excluded. Here and now, the obligation to disclose the position of my own voice will not be evaded. For it is as an "American" that I am confronted by this image—albeit as a dissenter. That is to say: in the logic of the "you are with us or against us" declared by George W. Bush to be the new law of the land after the attacks of September 2001, as an "un-American." (Echoes of witch-hunts past.) I will, moreover, have to say that I write these words as an (un-)American born in 1963, as the son of a veteran who saw combat from a U.S. Navy destroyer in the Pacific in 1944 and 1945. As a latecomer, then, as the heir of a legacy that, today's regressive patriotic displays notwithstanding, is not untroubled, is not without its traumatic perpetrations still stubbornly resistant to the focused attentions of enlightenment. A clubfoot, in short, at the crossroads of national identity.

What this image will ultimately bring into view, at a time when the 16-acre hole in Manhattan where the World Trade Center complex once stood has been sanctified as the new "ground zero," is the unresolved problem of U.S. responsibility for the 300,000 victims of the nuclear bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in August 1945. Since I am not the only latecomer—and am neither the only "American" nor the only "un-American"—there will be continuous slippage in the voice of this essay between the first-person singular and plural.

* * *

We are considering an image, a photograph of a blasted wristwatch. This much is clear on first glance. Despite the damage it has sustained, we recognize the circular watch face, two hands fixed to a common central axis, and a round casing with two points of attachment for a wrist strap. The watch, photographed directly from above, is clearly a relic: it functions within the image as visual evidence of something unseen, a prior event that would account for its ruined condition.

The image has force. It draws our attention with an insistence that seems to exceed the simple elements of which it consists. We investigate. By convention photographs are published with captions. Here the caption reads: "A Hiroshima victim's watch, stopped forever at the moment of the blast: 8:15. John Launois, Black Star."

The information conveyed by this caption changes the picture. Our relic is now linked to a specific conflagration: the destruction of a city and half of its population on the morning of August 6, 1945. Whatever that destruction, that human disaster, means to us is denoted in the place-name "Hiroshima." Let us at this point restrict ourselves to the indisputable. Hiroshima marks the deliberate surpassing of a threshold, the first use of a new weapon of mass destruction. If our watch has indeed survived this first detonation, it would acquire thereby a powerful and eloquent authority.

Returning to the image, we test it against the message of the caption. Having some idea of what is involved in an atomic explosion—some notion, however feeble, of the tremendous energy released in the form of light, heat, wind, and radiation—we compare our idea to the damage visible on the watch. What we see is consistent with the idea we hold. We see the glass is missing: shattered, melted, or sucked away. We see evidence of deep searing. Amber granulation and fissuring have turned the watch face into a roiled, terrain-like surface. Charring has turned the casing dark brown. Damage has rendered the watch fragile. We see that a chip of the casing at the lower left has broken off, possibly from the mere placing of the watch for the photograph. Rusty crumbs of detached casing are visible against the background. The skepticism we may have harbored is put to rest. We are convinced. We grant the watch its authority. We acknowledge its avowal.

But the watch does not let us go so easily. It holds our attention and impels our further inspection and reflection. We come to linger on the hands of the watch. We did not immediately read the time on display. In our first look at the watch, we discounted that time as irrelevant, since an instrument that has sustained the damage visible here would not be functional. We are, however, led back to the two hands, by the caption of course, but also by the fragments of numerical markers along the left of the face, where we make out the digits "8," "9," and "10." But the hands are weird, uncanny. One of them, vivid red, points to just before the eight. A shadow cast by a light source is visible below it. The other hand is black and points to the three position. This hand casts no shadow. What appears to be the base of a third, broken and missing hand, also black, is just visible overlaying the red one, projecting from the watch stem in the direction of the eight. The red hand, then, must be a second hand: 8:15:38. The unequivocal abruptness of the cessation is striking. We are stricken.

The watch has seized up, has been brought to a stop forcibly, as if what it normally would tell has been arrested in an extraordinary moment of failed telling. For what it now must tell is not the time, but something at first untellable, unsayable, except as the telling or saying of this stoppage of time itself—this cessation of telling in a beat or blink of light that blasts a moment out of the stream, obliterating in advance any adequate first saying of itself. For the "event" cannot be recognized at first, except as something far less than what it fully is. Such is the structure of trauma, the problem Freud called *Nachträglichkeit*: belatedness, aftereffectiveness, the deferral of occurrence and its effects. Neither the victims nor the survivors, neither the bystanders nor even the ones who made, approved, and delivered the bomb could have understood what took place at the site and instant of occurrence. The meaning of what happened, the specification of its "truth" and "untruth" as opposed to its mere description, is at this point, even for us

latecomers, barely thinkable, still mostly ineffable behind the density of its resistance. The retrospective reconstruction of occurrence would be the passage back from the stoppage of traumatic temporality. Its emplotment in narrative time would, possibly, restart the dialectical movement by which "truthful" historical meaning is dug out of its reified concealment.

The watch stopped, then, but so did ethico-political time. For this was a moment of qualitative transgression. A radical leap in destructive capacity was endorsed, exalted, and deployed—irreparably, beyond any possibility of undoing. In a way that is unique and specific, this choice brought an end to a history that, as we can now see, was emphatically naive, while at the same time, as in Maurice Blanchot's perverse paradox, "leaving everything intact."[1] Are we not of a different time, as a result of this destructive actualization? Is this not what the cliché of the atomic or nuclear age wants to say: that we no longer live within the old ethico-political time? In the old history or "pre-history," violence could be terrible, but never globally and universally terminal. Our daring new world suspends ethics and politics—or at least every known ethical and political heritage—while managing to naturalize blindness and numbness to the suspension. After Hiroshima, we inhabit a world immeasurably more threatening, a world threatened in fact to the very extreme and in this sense worthy of deep dread and even deeper denial. We know this, and we don't. We acknowledge it, but we refuse to acknowledge it. Preferring to remain intact, we take refuge in the banal and everyday: the workaday, precisely. The regime of clockable labor and universalized fungibility is the iron curtain against reflection. Time, emptied of ethics and politics, is money, with no remainder. We much prefer our own wristwatches to the "minutes to midnight" doomsday clock published in each issue of the *Bulletin of Atomic Scientists*.

If the "truth" of the referent "Hiroshima" could be grasped, who would be the one or ones to do it, and when? What was suffered there, on that morning and in the years that followed, must remain enigmatic and unredeemable. Our questions, inadequate to that suffering, will rather need to seek the implications of this inadequacy. What is the "truth" that would utter itself through this relic? Here, now, drawn into our image of a blasted watch, we latecomers—and most of all this should mean the Americans among us—set our powers of imagination to work on this question. Do our powers not fail, sublimely? This moment of the destruction of this city—flaring, mushrooming up before the full disclosure of that other attempted finality known by a different, European place-name could even quite begin—was it not the very moment when the human-inflicted catastrophe overwhelmingly and irreversibly replaced the natural disaster as the paradigm of sublimity? Encounters with the power and size of nature dominate the imagination and, according to Kant, throw us back on the dignity of

our reason and moral freedom, in that mixture of pain and enjoyment so treasured by romantic sensibilities. But all that gives way to the acute desolation of man-made disaster: the staggering genocides and murderous holocausts we've perpetrated on ourselves. (And this would still be true, wouldn't it, if "first nature" returned as the ultimate real, as the *reali*zation of our worst apocalyptic fears and temptations, in the form of an irreparably degraded global ecological base, increasingly unable to support life due to cumulative human impacts?) Sixty years after Auschwitz and Hiroshima, our thoughts are still trying to recognize what happened. Attempts to understand the relation between these two place-names work under a taboo and have hardly begun.

Let us deepen our gloss on Hiroshima by adding, and at the same time marking how difficult this will be, what we were not told at the time but by now should know. This first use of a nuclear weapon was executed without warning and with the aim of inflicting massive civilian death and suffering in a city which until then American strategists had deliberately preserved in an undamaged state, so that it could become a demonstration, the show piece of a new technology. This atrocity was not necessary—not to U.S. national survival, not to the defeat of fascism, not even to avoid an invasion of the Japanese main islands. Within a war machine that had already turned a systemic eye on the strategic domination of the postwar configuration, available alternatives to using the weapon against civilians were considered and expressly rejected.[2] What the demonstration was meant to demonstrate was the will to do, precisely, *that*. In the absence of unavoidable necessity, every justification for the quantum leap of a weapon without limits is spurious. Even in the context of a terrible war, this was terror, a genocidal atrocity: a crime against humanity, if such a thing exists at all. That this is still officially and popularly denied in the United States refutes nothing.

What remains for us latecomers: what kind of dignity, freedom, reason? If Hiroshima was a crime, who is guilty? To put Harry Truman and his cabinet on trial as war criminals in absentia would certainly be a belated exercise of enlightenment. But the more difficult questions of meaning and responsibility would hardly be touched by such a spectacle. For the guilt of statesmen shades troublingly, via the self-advertisements of the "democratic" polity, into collective responsibility. To ask who shares responsibility and how far it reaches into the "house of freedom" would be to begin to pose questions about inherited benefit and imperial privilege, about the links between American moral exceptionalism and the structural barbarism it has promoted and defended throughout the last century. None of this would be unconnected to the more recent U.S.-led globalization and intensification of the neoliberal "war of all against all." Given the global record and wreckage of all of that, which losses should be mourned, by whom and

in which order? These questions, which in ("infinite") justice should be inscribed at the center of American public life, are still hardly asked. At this moment they are not asked at all. Can it happen now? Will the hit finally take place? Can we restart ethico-political time?

In his justly admired 1940 essay "On the Concept of History" and in the unfinished *Passagen-Werk*, Walter Benjamin elaborated that potently charged experience of historical time he called the "Now" (*Jetztzeit*). Linking Marxist revolutionary theory to Jewish theology's notion of "messianic time," Benjamin's "Now" is a heightened sensitivity to the claims of the victims of history and the duty to settle those claims by bringing about the "real state of emergency" of systemic reorganization (CH 251–2/390–1, 258–61/395–7). Only a commitment to the "Now" can break the grip of an "empty, homogenous time" in which all the "events" have already happened and in which both the damage and the urgent task are concealed and congealed within a reified "intactness." To restart ethico-political time would be to break the stasis of empty, continuously elapsing time by an awakening to the "true" openness of history.[3]

The eloquence of this watch, the force of its avowal, is growing, accumulating. And still it is not done with us. For we are drawn back, somehow, to the two pin assemblies and arms extending from the watch casing at twelve and six o'clock. One of them, the lower in the image, is broken, bent, and pinched against the casing. On these pins the wristband was attached. But the wristband is missing.

And this discovery leads us inevitably to another disclosure, another avowal of this blasted watch. This timepiece was worn on the wrist of a living person on the morning of August 6, 1945. Not just the band, not just the living wrist and arm, but the whole person, whose watch this was, is gone, utterly, into the flashing, roaring, rushing instant of disappearing, of terminal reduction and dispersal: 8:15:38. What happened to the watch, then, also happened to this person, presumably a man, whose name was at the center of a network of roles and daily relations—who wore a watch. Except for this: the destruction of the physical person was absolute. All that remains to mark it, as its trace, as the sign on the door to an absence, is this ruined remnant.

Another moment, then, of what Kant designated "negative presentation" (CJ §29, 201/135). The watch qua relic of violence first turned us toward the blast of which it continues to be the negative register. Qua personal token, it now orients us toward the absence of its former owner, who by our attention returns from his absence to avow what happened. We can now say that this blasted watch is haunted.

Somehow we did not expect that such a haunting lurked there. Our looking, our attention, conjured it from the image without our meaning to

do so. Hence our consternation, which we felt uncertainly as a kind of slippage of our intentional hold on the image. Acting on the image, we reached a point at which it began to act on us. We may say at that point, that instant, that it "blew us away." In its wake something can become more real for us. The fate of this man, whose watch this was and whose name the blast has carried away, is written on the watch. This fate, this negative writing, is the bridge between private and public history, that bridge which—like the one in Hiroshima, named "Aioi" ("Live Together"), used as the aiming point by the American bombardier in the *Enola Gay*—we would have to cross and re-cross to understand what the "event" of that morning means for us—or should mean. In the anguished reach of such crossings, the promised reconciliation of the singular and the universal would be prefigured and refracted. We have arrived at the hard core of trauma embedded in this image. The ordeal of this contact flays the imagination and short circuits— at least for us American latecomers, at least for a beat—the defense of denial. It is the muscling hit and destination of this moment, at the end of a sequence of moments of accumulating force, which I assert to be sublime.

* * *

So far we have read the image of the blasted watch as an object of more or less isolated *aesthesis*. While this method has led us far into the image, it is, by itself, artificial and inadequate. For in fact we never encounter images as isolated or unmediated aesthetic objects. We always encounter them as pieces of visual culture, within specific social and political contexts. Bringing such contexts into view returns us to more primal scenes of social violence and its structural legacies. For, although the disciplinary hybrid of memory studies has often taken its inspiration from Michel Foucault's methodological reflections on Nietzsche—and in particular his teasing introduction, in a 1971 essay, of the notion of "counter-memory"[4]—the basic insight that cultural artefacts are always sites of struggle was of course already a tenet of Marxist criticism. That tenet was given its most eloquent (if unorthodox) retelling in the seventh thesis of Walter Benjamin's 1940 essay on history (CH 253–4/391–2). In that text and in "Konvolut N" of the *Passagen-Werk*, Benjamin elaborates his notion of "the dialectical image" as a site where moments from the past suddenly become recognizable in their charged relation to the struggles of the present. In the "true" image of the past, the memory of the victims can be rescued, remarked, and reactivated in a moment of urgency: "Image is that wherein what has been meets the Now in the flash of a constellation."[5]

To condense the intersection of critical theory, memory studies, and visual culture studies I am gesturing to here, we could say that official,

administered memory and forms of counter-memory are always struggling for control of key images. To that we could add that those images will be key which harbor the hit of the sublime. This will become clear as we read our image of the blasted wristwatch in the specific contexts in which it actually appeared. For although the watch qua relic may be preserved in the collections of the Peace Memorial Museum in Hiroshima, its appearances in American visual culture, in the form of published photographic images, have been the result of deliberate deployments. Our image does not appear to us floating freely on the surface of visual culture, as the analysis up to this point has assumed, but issues from specific places within the spectacle. A survey of three of these will clarify how cultural meaning emerges from the contestation of images.

The photograph of the Hiroshima wristwatch appears on the back cover of a particular book, *The History of the Atomic Bomb*, a volume of the popular "American Heritage Junior Library" series published in 1968.[6] A collaboration by "the editors of American Heritage," writer Michael Blow, and physicist William Watson, this text is aimed at secondary school readers. In it, what had by 1947 become established as official history is redacted into "the most astonishing story of World War II" (p. 7). Here, the Manhattan Project becomes the mythical site where brilliant, larger-than-life characters strove to crack the codes of the universe under strict wartime secrecy. Young science buffs are walked through the physics, all the while reassured that "only the unmatched industrial power of the United States could have transformed the scientists' vision into reality" (p. 7). The destruction of Hiroshima and Nagasaki are here treated as a regrettable wartime necessity that, in any case, "had saved hundreds of thousands of lives" (p. 128). Moral doubts about the decision are registered within the narrative, only to be elided into platitudes: the "solemn burden" of the postwar generation to keep the peace and support the construction of nuclear power plants (p. 7). There is no mention here of the 1945 accident at Los Alamos that made young scientist Harry Daghlian the world's first nuclear fatality. There is no mention of the awful legacy, left for the reader's generation to contend with, of uncounted tons of nuclear waste and the proliferation of nuclear weapons. The text ends with a long quotation from Truman's Secretary of War Henry Stimson, exhorting mankind to use nuclear energy "for the well-being of civilization": "The focus of the problem does not lie in the atom; it resides in the hearts of men"[7] (p. 145).

What is barely latent in this image-rich textual document is what Robert Jay Lifton and Greg Mitchell have called "nuclearism," or "the worship of a revolutionary instrument of destruction."[8] The intense wartime pressure under which the scientists of the Manhattan Project worked, their nearness to fundamental mysteries of matter and energy, and the effects of secrecy

and unlimited resources all contributed to a sense of sacred mission. The July 16 test shot in Alamogordo, awesome beyond expectation, produced what Lifton and Mitchell call the "Trinity power surge." Those who did not resist the spell performed an identificatory "merger with the weapon, a breakdown of boundaries between man and bomb to the extent that each came to represent—to support, enhance and speak for—the other." Lifton and Mitchell cite government-picked journalist William Laurence's account of the bombing run over Nagasaki as an exemplary expression of this effect: "And here I am," wrote Laurence. "I am destiny. I know. They don't know. But I know that this was their last night on earth."[9]

The notion of nuclearism clarifies for us what Adorno would have called the "untruth" of the nuclear sublime: its tendency to produce an active passivity that no longer resists the most extreme violence, but actually savors it as the mark of exceptionalism, of a special mission and destiny. Dominick LaCapra has pointed to a similar sublime at work in the fantasy that sanctioned Nazi genocide.[10] Any attempt to rescue the "truth" or emancipatory potential of this aesthetic category would have to distinguish clearly between a sublime in which the hit functions as the catalyst of a critical memorial process and one in which a kind of intoxication ends in moral blinding and paralysis. This dialectical handling enables us to recognize that the publication of our image on the back cover of this book is an attempt to enlist it as a fetish of nuclearism.

The seduction of the book aimed at young people is that it does not deny the human destruction and suffering of the nuclear victims, for these are duly registered in the narrative. It simply denies this destruction and suffering any ethical or political importance sufficient to act as a check on the technological excitement and momentum. This message is mirrored in the images that frame the text in the book's design. In the front end-paper, an illustration provided by the U.S. Atomic Energy Commission depicts a gang of excited scientists "crowd[ing] a balcony in a converted squash court at the University of Chicago to witness the first self-sustaining chain reaction." The back end-paper, however, reproduces a 1960s-era photograph showing "Japanese children romp[ing] in a playground near Hiroshima's gutted Industry Promotion Hall." The meaning of the double image is clear: the suffering caused by this wonderful technology was regrettable, but not to worry, see, everything is all right now. The disturbance of the "gutted" Industry Promotion Hall is held to the background, against which—see?—happy children are busy playing. This formal elision in the book's visual design is repeated on its covers. On the front cover, in the privileged position, is a photograph of a spectacular "1946 test explosion emerg[ing] from the Pacific as a giant bubble." On the back cover, always slipping from view, is our image of the blasted watch.

This false symmetrical hierarchy is disturbed, however, by the supplement or remainder of sublimity in the hit of our image. For it yields that counter-narrative we have already read in the second section of this essay. What we can now say is that an image that packs this kind of hit demands fetishization—and will receive it as its due. The open question is whether the image will function, in this particular case, as a fetish of nuclearism or as a fetish of counter-memory. While the individual spectator can bind the image into either register, the answer to this question on a collective level will largely depend on the context of reception in which the choice is posed. The book appeared in the eventful year of 1968—the year of assassinations and massive social and antiwar protests in the United States, of Tet and My Lai in Vietnam, and of major anti-systemic uprisings in Paris, Prague, Berlin, Mexico City, Dakar, Calcutta, and elsewhere. We may think, then, that its systemic function was to pre-select and recruit junior readers for eventual places in the U.S. military–industrial complex, even as images of the traumatic effects of its technology were broadcast every evening into homes across America. But when we consider that in the decade from 1963 to 1973, a period of relative public quiescence with respect to nuclear issues, a rapid increase in the construction of domestic nuclear power plants got underway, we begin to suspect that something subtler was at work. For the book holds out a doubled appeal: both the seductive power of the war atom and the gleaming promise of the peaceful atom are on offer, but in a way that does not force a choice between them and which avoids or conceals the political and economic realities fusing these atomic "alternatives" into one densely interpenetrated official project.[11] That our Hiroshima watch image resists the role that would here be assigned to it—to mark a destruction only to manage it—will become clear at once as we continue to trace its functions in context.

The image appears again in a book called *The Gaia Peace Atlas*, published in 1988, several years after an intensification of cold war rhetoric, expenditures, and deployments under the Reagan administration and the accidental explosion of a reactor at Chernobyl had provoked another period of antinuclear activism. This collaborative volume, addressed to a general readership, involved founders of the discipline of peace studies Frank Barnaby and Johan Galtung, German Green Petra Kelly, South African peace and human rights activist Archbishop Desmond Tutu, and then UN secretary-general Javier Pérez de Cuéllar.[12] Our image appears within a graphic work by photomontagist Peter Kennard. The round face of the watch is reproduced four times, forming a square of two rows. Beginning at the upper left, what is clearly recognizable as an approximation of our watch (it appears to be a photographic reproduction overworked with acrylic or oil) is progressively transformed into, at the lower right, a peace symbol.

This appropriative citation, which is uncaptioned and already assumes familiarity with the original image, visually enacts the production of memorial politics we have been exploring here. The blasted watch is symbolically (re)claimed as an icon for counter-memory and the peace and global justice movement.[13] Kennard's graphic work opens "Chapter 6: The Struggle for Peace," and shares a page spread with a short introductory text by Desmond Tutu that confirms the visual message: "How can we ever not bow our heads in shame when we think of the Auschwitzes, of the Hiroshimas and the Nagasakis? . . . The world will know no peace until there is global justice, when nations will be ready to share their resources more equitably."

The book's analysis of Hiroshima is uncompromising. In illustrated panels elaborating an introductory discussion of the limits to the conduct of war inscribed in the 1907 Hague Convention and the UN Charter, the February 1945 terror bombing of Dresden is examined and pronounced "immoral." In the next panel, the focus turns to Hiroshima:

> The bombing of Hiroshima on 6 August 1945 produced 130,000 immediate casualties and razed 90 per cent of the city. The atomic bomb did not distinguish between civilians and soldiers; it inflicted unnecessary suffering out of all proportion to the object of the attack; it infringed the Hague Convention because it produced radioactivity, which is poisonous; its effects were not limited in scope or in duration. On all these grounds, the bombing was illegal.[14]

Other passing discussions of Hiroshima and extensive treatments of all aspects of the nuclear threat, from proliferation to environmental damage to the drain on social resources, leave the unmistakable impression that the first use was indefensible by any ethical, political, or legal standard and has left the world a legacy of insecurity that subverts human dignity and the principles and institutions of international humanitarian law.

Our image turns up again in the midst of the *Enola Gay* controversy, on the cover of the January–February 1995 issue of *Civilization*, the magazine of the U.S. Library of Congress. Here the blasted watch, enlarged to many times the original, is dramatically set against a solid black background. Below it floats the title of the issue's cover story—"50 Years Later: Why We Dropped the Bomb"—by "revisionist" historian William Lanouette. This essay, reflecting what J. Samuel Walker would just months later call a "new consensus" among historians,[15] is followed by a second story, by Adam Goodheart, which specifically takes apart the mythical claim, much repeated by critics of the Smithsonian Institution's planned *Enola Gay* exhibition, that the bomb saved a million American lives. On the contents page inside, the caption to our image reads: "A watch found at Hiroshima, with the hands frozen at the time of detonation. Photograph by Seiji Fukusawa."

By January 1995, acrimonious public debate about the planned exhibition at the Smithsonian's National Air and Space Museum had been raging for nine months. At the end of the month, Director Martin Harwit and the curators at the Air and Space Museum were forced to capitulate unconditionally to a coalition of veteran's groups and conservative members of Congress: cleansed of any critical questions, the aircraft that dropped the bomb on Hiroshima would be displayed as a heroic object. In this context, we can recognize the publication of our watch image on the cover of the magazine of the Library of Congress as a courageous editorial intervention. It confirms what we have been remarking here, the capacity of this relic, which was to have been included in the exhibition as it was originally planned, to avow counter-memorial meanings and subvert the stability of official, administered narratives. The image of the blasted watch on the magazine cover—framed above by the word "Civilization" and below by the title of the cover story—reads like a literal historical transcription of Benjamin's prescient 1940 formula: "There is no document of culture that is not at the same time a document of barbarism" (CH 254/392). Despite the suppression of the *Enola Gay* exhibition in its critical form, the controversy itself exposed the general public to the existence of unsettling critiques of official history. That such exposure was not without effect is confirmed seven years later, in the wake of the attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon in September 2001, by the return of the specifically freighted term "ground zero." For what can the return of this term announce, if not the discursive "acting out" of precisely the unresolved problem we have been tracking?

* * *

In the confusion and relief of war's end, the hit of a qualitative historical "event" is missed by the planetary collective of subjects. Globally, humanity begins to work through this calamity, but in the perpetrating nation this work stands under an enforced ban. The consequences of that ban and the refusal of which it is a symptom, continue to unfold after the Cold War in the form of a need for an enemy who would be a credible target for unbounded violence and whose existence would continue to retrospectively legitimize the illegitimate. System and symptom converge in national interest and U.S. investment. In the land of the free, September 11 crystallized the ideological configuration. The so-called war on terror would not only shore up a slipping hegemonic position in a world system in crisis. It would, catastrophically, enforce a longstanding ban on self-critical reflection. The tangled tale behind the September atrocity will not be disclosed. It will not be tracked down to its structural imperatives. But moral authority does not follow automatically in

the train of a vastly superior power of death: as the war machine attacks, this will be the next shocking lesson. Here and now, in the spasms of U.S. national regression, the flags are flying. But in the hit of an image, a subject returns to a missed appointment with the "truth" of objective historical meaning.

To approach that meaning, to break the ban on critical questions, would be to ask how the heirs of four centuries of capitalism and more than two centuries of enlightened culture produced Auschwitz and Hiroshima. It would be to seek in these two qualitative eruptions the shared social catastrophe to which they both, across obvious differences, belong. It is true that Europe and the United States are not alone in perpetrating genocide and advancing the progress of barbarism. But it is more "true" that Auschwitz and Hiroshima are indictments of Euro-American modernity that the main drivers and beneficiaries of that modernity will have to confront and process. What is at stake in those names is of urgent global concern, but it is for the heirs of Euro-American culture and economics to first approach the systemic catastrophe through the ordeals of self-critique. No one can mourn in the place of another.

Hannah Arendt's probing early attempts to isolate the singularity of the Nazi genocide remain as sound as the more recent and concise formulations of Eberhard Jäckel.[16] This was the first time that the exterminating logic, voiced in the isolated utterances of the historical General Sheridan ("The only good Indian is a dead Indian.") or Conrad's fictional Kurz, was developed into the absolute form of an official policy pursued by every means available to the state. Others, from Raul Hilberg to Enzo Traverso, have isolated the core of specificity in the combination of a racial project of biological purity, industrialized technology, and bureaucratic implementation.[17] Giorgio Agamben has recently used a Foucauldian idiom to sharpen this combination into a philosophically precise formulation: in the industrial production of "bare life" in the dehumanized figure of the "Muselmann," Auschwitz was a "biopolitical" experiment "that transforms and disarticulates the subject to a limit point in which the link between subjectification and desubjectification seem to break apart."[18] Auschwitz was thus, as Traverso in particular emphasizes, a synthesis of systemic logics and tendencies that existed in less lethal forms in all the Euro-American nations and their dominated colonies. The development of this particular synthesis and the rigor of its "finality" was a radicalization made possible by a certain conjuncture of German history and Euro-American culture in the Nazi regime—within a wartime context too facilely and quickly labeled "total war."

Within this same context of violence, which had steadily normalized the targeting of civilians and the terror bombing of cities, a so-called liberal democracy applied all of its scientific, technological, and industrial resources to develop a weapon of unlimited destructive potential. Doing so

was justifiable, given the wartime context, even if that context of shredded humanitarian law and tradition was itself neither inevitable nor justified. The U.S. government, however, went on to deploy that weapon against civilians at a time when the military threats to its national survival produced by the war were no longer credible. The specificity of Hiroshima is this: it marks the deliberate and unnecessary first use of a qualitatively new technology of terror, which for the first time credibly globalizes the threat of instantaneous extermination.

An objection to this is that while in Auschwitz the Nazi regime had pursued genocide as an end in itself, the United States ushered in the era of nuclear terror as a means to just ends. Even if, in hindsight, the nuclear means can be judged disproportionate and counterproductive to the end of a free and perpetual peace, this could not have been clear to U.S. policymakers at the time. To this it suffices to answer that if Truman and his cabinet did not reject mass terror as an unethical and politically inappropriate means with which to attain such an end, it was precisely because a blindness had been structurally overdetermined by a barbarous conjunction of Euro-American values and American history. The use of nuclear weapons on a non-European people had been prepared by the genocidal conquest of a continent and by an institutionalized racism that persists well beyond the formal abolition of slavery. The long tradition of American moral exceptionalism, with roots in colonial Puritanism and the doctrine of "manifest destiny," merged with an uncritical faith in progress and fed into the Manhattan Project, producing the flawed belief that the United States was uniquely qualified to wield infinite force. This ideology conformed to the pragmatic calculations of an instrumental reason that was already, in August 1945, evaluating various postwar scenarios from the perspective of economic opportunity. According to the logic of capital, the American profit machine and the apparatus of terror seamlessly merged.

This is not to reject the role of individual decision-makers as utterly irrelevant. Intentionalist and functionalist factors always intersect and interact in historical causation. Truman and his cabinet could after all have drawn on the promise of the Enlightenment tradition, rather than on the tradition of its instrumentalization, and have refused the temptation to use the new weapon in a gamble to monopolize its presumed advantages. Exposing the layer of structural imperatives clarifies why they did not do so. Moreover and more painfully, to take seriously the argument that Nazism was inherently evil in a way that the United States never was would be to ask if the willingness to kill hundreds of thousands through a technology that permits one to act at a distance and keep one's hands clean is really less evil than an industrialized genocide that, in killing millions, was never able to eliminate the appalling cruelty of face to face encounters.

Whether the legacy of Auschwitz will in the end prove worse than that of Hiroshima is doubtful. As Jonathan Schell reminds us, the "long" or "real twentieth century"—the last phase of which began on August 6, 1945—is still "unfinished."[19] Hiroshima left the Americans with a new institutional nexus of profit, secrecy, and power. But in a vicious circle, the effort to enforce its nuclear monopoly led to an intensification of secrecy and a perpetual culture of national security that quickly corroded civil rights and democratic foundations. Year by year, the state of terror was naturalized. Proliferation led to an arms race that produced new sectors of profit as inexorably as it consumed the common social wealth and spun off self-justifying strategic doctrines of "mutually assured destruction." After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the best chance since 1945 to contain and pacify this reckless structural irrationality came and went.[20] The United States is no more prepared to give up its material advantages than it is willing to let go of the doomed hope that it will be able to keep them indefinitely. Those sectors that benefit rationally from the status quo are willing to risk continued systemic irrationalities that hug the brink of total destruction. As the logic of structural barbarism under the U.S.-led neoliberal world order expresses itself in new and unforeseen combinations, Adorno's motif of freedom collapsing into unfreedom repeats itself with cumulative ferocity. In the neoliberal phase of systemic imperialism, the global South, kept in a debtor's prison, is forced to watch as its resources and social wealth are plundered through the ruses of coerced "structural adjustment," privatization, and corruption. Those who resist these processes, from whatever ideological formation, are crushed by main force. A war without an end that perpetually generates the terror it purports to fight mystifies to itself its own origins even as those who declare it continue to cynically exploit every opportunity. It is a chilling moment. It gives no pleasure to be able to say with certainty that nothing less than a radically renewed commitment to the global collectivity will be able to move the stopped hands of the Hiroshima wristwatch. But perhaps that commitment already has its first provisional names: Chiapas, Seattle, Porto Alegre, Genoa.

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Installing a "New Cosmopolitics": Derrida and the Writers

> *Let us hear the shout of the world . . . Let us honor these writers who have strayed so far from their native lands, knowing that they have much to offer and that they aid us in weaving the fabric of our network of tolerance and solidarity. Let us heed this shout emerging from everywhere, from mass graves and places of ethnic genocide, from ethnic cleansing camps, the pitiless wars and wanton massacres.*
> —Edouard Glissant

If, even now, we could still hope to place the non-place or impossible place of "utopia" within a space of its own or a territory proper to it, what would or could its placement or realization mean? If, despite everything, despite the bitter catastrophes and transgressions of a traumatic century, we still found ourselves willing to hope at all, could or would we want to give that hope a *mis-en-scène*, a setting or location? Would we still want to try, that is, even today and even if more modestly, to install a utopian promise or demand in the scene, "on the ground," somewhere, in this or that "theater of operations"? Or would we be more inclined to displace that *topos* into a zone of unsettled, de-territorialized action: a mobile set of practices, perhaps, or a way or form of thinking and responding? Can the impossible place, the un-place that can't take its place on the historical stage or in the scheme of things, nevertheless, even now, somehow urge us on, "beyond the place we find ourselves" or what is merely the case, beyond the borders of the status quo and in the direction of an undeconstructible "justice"?—"if," as Derrida says, "such a thing exists, outside or beyond law" (FL 14). Can we, could we, nonviolently or at least without too much discursive or inter-pretive violence, "cut to the chase," cut through or across all of these spatial tropes and metaphors, all of these Derridean inflections, cadences, and resonances, all of this "discrete irony"?

For we have been learning, increasingly over the last dozen years, that Jacques Derrida does dare to hope, that he puts his hope in "enlightenment" and "emancipation," that he "believes" in justice, as an "infinite responsibility,"

an unconditional hospitality and forgiveness, an impossible pressure on the work of mourning, on the work-play of receiving a ghastly heritage, and responding to a world of urgency. Hedgingly, it is true: tentatively, carefully, vigilantly, with rigorous equivocations and reservations, with copious deployments of double inverted commas, "under erasure." But we can read the signs and can recognize, with a kind of breathless observation and relief, the unfolding or resolving figure of commitment: the great French critical theorist has stepped up and drawn his lines. He has marked his "place" after all. From "there" he makes his stand. He intervenes, movingly, impressively, with increasing risk and exposure. More and more, and more and more directly, he takes the measure of the situation and responds to "the matters of urgency that assail us." Derrida's co-foundational role in the International Parliament of Writers (IPW) and his involvement in its "Cities of Asylum" network surely constitute one of the most sited and constructive moments of an admirable and ever-more legible engagement.

* * *

In May 1993, an assassin gunned down Algerian novelist Tahar Djaout in front of his home in a suburb of Algiers. Alarmed, Christian Salmon and others involved in the Strasbourg-based *Carrefour des littératures européenes* responded by issuing an appeal for a new structure to support writers threatened with violence or censorship.[1] Approximately 300 international novelists, poets, journalists, and intellectuals signed on to the July 1993 appeal. Organizational discussions took place the following November, when writers gathered in Strasbourg for the annual meeting of the *Carrefour*, and the IPW was formally founded in February 1994. The original executive board of seven included Salmon, Derrida, Syrian poet Adonis, South African poet and former militant Breyten Breytenbach, French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu, Franco-Caribbean poet and theorist Edouard Glissant, and Indian novelist Salman Rushdie. Rushdie, who had lived under the threat of religious assassination since Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini had issued a *fatwa* against him in 1989, was elected as the organization's first president.[2]

The choice of the term "parliament" to name the new group seems to have been intended, at least on one level, as an ironic counterpoint to the European Parliament in Brussels. For the IPW, as Salmon observes, "has no power, no assembly hall, no registrar," and, at least to begin with, "no great financial resources."[3] In its efforts "to invent new ways for writers to intervene in public,"[4] however, this collective has been energetic and effective. If its strength lies in its members' combined "symbolic capital,"—itself derived from their demonstrated capacity to produce discourse that hits the

mark or, as Derrida would say, reaches the address—the IPW has invested that capital in the development of a potent ensemble of apparatuses for broadly publicizing the plight of writers threatened by political violence and repression. Its journal, *Autodafe*, is simultaneously published in five languages and distributed internationally. The range of European and North American newspapers in which its texts and appeals command space includes such influential and politically diverse organs as *Corriere della Sera*, *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, *The Guardian*, *Libération*, *Le Monde*, *The Nation*, and *El Pais*. Reports of its activities and interventions as well as interviews with its most active members have appeared in many more. An extensive archive of texts spanning all of these genres and categories is maintained on the IPW website, in English and French. The IPW's most impressive and innovative achievement, however, has been the construction of an international network of "Cities of Asylum" offering material support and a level of protection to writers persecuted or censored in their native countries.

The origins of the network date back to the IPW founding discussions in November 1993. At that time the Strasbourg City Council offered Rushdie the "freedom of the city" and declared Strasbourg a "City of Asylum for persecuted intellectuals." A legal and institutional basis for an expandable network was worked out when the IPW and the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of Europe (CLRAE) collaborated to draft a "Charter of Cities of Asylum." This charter, citing relevant international humanitarian law and establishing financial and administrative standards and commitments that subscribing cities would have to meet in hosting threatened writers for periods of one to two years, was adopted by the CLRAE in May 1995 and by the European Parliament four months later.[5] Since then the network has expanded to, at this writing, 34 cities and regions—including Barcelona, Berlin, Frankfurt, Ithaca (NY), Lagos, Lausanne, Las Vegas, Paris, and Venice, as well as the regions of Tuscany and the Île-de-France. It has hosted writers from Afghanistan, Algeria, Belarus, Chechnya, China, Congo, Cuba, Iran, Iraq, Kosovo, Serbia, Sierra Leone, Vietnam, and Zimbabwe.

At the first IPW Cities of Asylum Congress, held in Strasbourg in March 1996, Derrida gave the project its first theoretical reflection. Published under the title "Cosmopolitans of All Countries, Keep Trying!" (a playful *détournement* of Kant, Marx, and Sade),[6] his address is contemporaneous with and to some extent summarizes a seminar on the topic of hospitality that he conducted in Paris in January of the same year. Two lectures from that seminar, along with a response by Anne Dufourmantelle, were published as *Of Hospitality*. While these texts cannot justly be read in isolation from the other traces and gestures of Derrida's critical practice, here I will have to limit *that* kind of placement—the retrospective indication of

their place within an authorial context and development, within a signed oeuvre—to a consideration of just one other text (but a just text, a text about justice). The 1989 essay "Force of Law: The 'Mystical Foundation of Authority' " marks, as we'll see, a crucial thematic turn in Derrida's writing and is indispensable for the interpretation of the texts that followed. Not the least of these would be the 1994 *Specters of Marx*, which bridges the 1989 essay on justice and the later texts on hospitality.

* * *

Talking to the writers about their new collaborative project, the foundation of the Cities of Asylum network, Derrida spoke of their shared "dream of a novel status for the city" that would be or would try to be "a *renewal* of international law" (OCF 3, Derrida's italics). He asks them to think of the new network as "something more or other" than a banal exploitation of the possibilities to be found in international law as it currently exists. It should rather aim to be "an audacious call for a genuine innovation in the history of the right to asylum or the duty to hospitality" (OCF 4). This innovation, "this new ethic," would point to or would even hope to institute "another politics of the city," or a "new cosmo*politics*" (OCF 5, 4, 8, Derrida's italics):

> The name "cities of asylum"[7] appears to be inscribed in gold letters at the very heart of the constitution of the International Parliament of Writers. Ever since our first meeting, we have been calling for the opening of such refuge cities across the world. That, in effect, very much resembles a new cosmo*politics*. We have undertaken to bring about the proclamation and institution of numerous and, above all, autonomous "cities of asylum," each as independent from the other and from the state as possible, but, nevertheless, allied to each other according to forms of solidarity yet to be invented. This invention is our task; the theoretical or critical reflection it involves is indissociable from the practical initiatives we have already, out of a sense of urgency, initiated and implemented. (OCF 4, Derrida's italics)

These yet-to-be-invented forms of solidarity would involve or at least request a "reorientation" of the politics of the state. They would disturb the existing juridical structures and legal instruments that stabilize the relations between city and state and that regulate and police official hospitality through control over the definition of citizenship and the rules of immigration and visitation. "We would ask [the Cities of Asylum] to transform and reform the modalities of membership by which the city (*cité*) belongs to the state." And this reformation–transformation would necessarily unsettle "the inviolable rule of state sovereignty" (OCF 4). The "city," understood here as a point in a network that is also a place in a real city situated within existing

national borders, is to be the site where a new form of transnational solidarity can be worked out and realized. The city, as a specific metropolis, is being asked to permit, authorize, and share in the institution of a new law of hospitality, a new set of norms, rights, and duties, that is more generous than that codified in existing national and international law.

Derrida goes on, with the sparkling lucidity and erudition that we have come to expect of him, to situate the Cities of Asylum project within the multiple "Western" traditions of hospitality to which we are heirs: the Hebraic or "Abrahamic" tradition of the right to immunity and hospitality, the medieval tradition of city sovereignty and the right to offer sanctuary and refuge, and the Greek Stoic and Pauline Christian traditions of hospitality that were redacted into Enlightenment formulations of cosmopolitanism. From his critical reading of these traditions, explored at more length in the Paris seminars, and from his brief but incisive discussions of texts by Kant and Hannah Arendt, Derrida derives the aporia or paradoxical relation between an unconditioned law of hospitality and the conditioned law*s* of hospitality. The place or double movement of ethical decision straddles or operates between these two "regimes of law." We will return to this difficult notion. But at this point, we will need, as Derrida likes to say, "to make a detour," to link up to another text.

*   *   *

Derrida was invited to address an October 1989 Cardozo Law School colloquium called "Deconstruction and the Possibility of Justice." In "Force of Law," the essay he wrote for that occasion, Derrida begins for the first time to explicitly thematize the problem of justice. There, he acknowledges that what is called deconstruction had by that time developed the reputation of a practice that somehow refused questions of justice and scorned political commitments. He protests that reputation, but not without enough legible defensiveness to indicate it was not entirely undeserved. Pointing to his texts on Levinas, Hegel, Freud, Kafka, and Nelson Mandela, he parries the charge that his concerns have been apolitical. And he moreover implies that the ethic of reading, of response and responsibility, that he developed, is a practice that reflects, at least indirectly, a scrupulous concern for justice:

> It goes without saying that discourses on double affirmation, the gift beyond exchange and distribution, the undecidable, the incommensurable or the incalculable, or on singularity, difference and heterogeneity are also, through and through, at least obliquely, discourses on justice. (FL 7)

The importance of "Force on Law"—its indispensability—is that with this text Derrida will now move from a just practice that is its own demonstration

or justification to a more explicit thematics of justice. He will now begin to link the signature tropes of his practice directly to a theoretical or philosophical exposition of the problem of justice. And this more direct exposition has, we can now say, colored or inflected all of his subsequent work. It has helped us to recognize his moving essays on the topics of hospitality and forgiveness, for example, both as a deepening of his analysis of justice and its traditions and as linked political interventions into specific contexts of urgency. We, therefore, need to read this text with great care and attention.

Derrida reads across several of Pascal's *pensées* in order to underscore the fact that every law has a traceable origin. From that originary structure, he begins to draw a distinction between, on the one hand, "law" (or "the law*s*") as a body of authorized or legitimate rules or codes and, on the other, "justice" (or "*the* law") as something that situates itself beyond the realm of actually existing laws in some categorical, absolute, or unconditional way. Prior to the moment in which the laws are founded, there is no law as such: "the founding and justifying moment that institutes law implies a performative force, which is always an interpretive force" (FL 13). While this moment of law's origin is itself neither legal nor illegal, neither just nor unjust, since it could not appeal to or violate any prior law, it always involves or at least implies a "*coup de force*," an act or performance of violence that is immediately effaced, forgotten, or repressed as authority is established. Back at the foundation, then, there is always a mystical act of forceful assertion, of "self-authorization" or auto-foundation, and this originary performative–interpretive violence is, mystically, the object of an agreed upon amnesia.

This is the sense of Derrida's title: behind the "force of law"—in other words law's authority and legitimacy, its claim to be worthy of en*force*ment— is law's originary force, which, like the fact that law has an origin at all, is at the same time obscured, mystified, repressed in the foundational act or performance, practically as a condition of its legitimization. Law covers its tracks even as it founds or institutes itself, and that is the sense of Montaigne's phrase, cited by Pascal—the "mystical foundation of authority"— that Derrida takes as the second part of his title. The mystical act of origin or foundation is also metaphysical: it constructs the opposition between the "unfounded" (raw "nature") and the "founded" ("culture" or "convention"), but is itself beyond that opposition, since it belongs to neither term of it. And every subsequent foundation that assumes and sustains that opposition—every institution, like the IPW or the Cities of Asylum network, that assumes the existence of laws and the law, of specific contexts and conventions—can only defer the problem of the justice of originary force, since way behind or in back of the dense web of culture must lie an originary

origin (FL 12–14). And this would be so even if we can only ever recognize such an origin retrospectively, as a logical necessity rather than a historical or empirical verifiability: belatedly, too late, as an "always already," a "trace" rather than a full and foundational presence.

Law itself, then, poses the question or problem of justice: the problem of an originary force or violence and its repression, of the reverberations of law's irreducible force. The disclosure, recovery, and remembrance of that origin and its conditions would belong to the practice of deconstruction. This shows us that laws are always deconstructible. As specific instances or instantiations of something we now and still too obscurely call "justice," laws are "conditioned" and embedded in historical and cultural contexts that can always be critically deconstructed. Derrida can now begin to formulate the problem of "the possibility of justice" and the relation of such a possibility to deconstruction:

> The fact that law is deconstructible is not bad news. We may even see in this a stroke of luck for politics, for all historical progress. But the paradox that I'd like to submit for discussion is the following: it is this deconstructible structure of law (*droit*), or if you prefer of justice as *droit*, that also insures the possibility of deconstruction. Justice in itself, if such a thing exists, outside or beyond law, is not deconstructible. No more than deconstruction itself, if such a thing exists. Deconstruction is justice. (FL 14–15)

Justice, then, is to be distinguished from law as such (or the law*s*, plural). *The* law, if it is possible for that to exist as something other than a body of founded, instituted, conditioned, and therefore deconstructible legal instruments or codes, would have to mark a beyond or outside of law. Justice, that is, cannot be identical or reducible to legality, legitimacy, authority, and so on. Justice would be a name for what animates the practice of deconstruction, the work of critically deciphering the structure of notions such as "legality," "legitimacy," "authority." "If it exists": this equivocation will have to remain in place, even if the practitioners of deconstruction will have to assume the possibility of such an existence, will have to act *as if* such a justice can exist, if their readings, interpretations, and textual interventions would be "just" and not merely "legal," in the sense of conformity to the rules and conventions of a context or discourse.

Justice as "*the* law" and law as "the law*s*" are categorically different: they define and belong to two different "regimes of law," as Derrida will put in the Paris seminar on hospitality.[8] These two regimes relate to each other in a paradoxical way. The laws always appeal to a notion of justice that is beyond legality and legitimacy, and yet they always fall short of realizing that notion. Justice for its part would be meaningless without at least the implication that it can and must be "realized," and yet it cannot be realized

as anything other than an instance of conditioned and therefore deconstructible law—as something less, that is, than justice. Justice is, would be, unconditional, absolute, infinite, gracious, aneconomic, entirely beyond the logic of exchange (the structure of reciprocity, debt, proportion, calculation, compensation, distribution, and so on). It would be a non-strategic one-way movement without return, something like a gift in the strictest sense. Law, on the other hand, is necessarily conditioned, limited, finite, mundane, situated within the circuits and the economy of exchange and calculation, of weighing and judging, of liability and reciprocity, of specified rights and duties. The two regimes of law are heterogeneous, but indissociable: each simultaneously implies and excludes, needs and trans-gresses the other, and this paradoxical relation is constitutive of both and cannot be resolved dialectically. Left to themselves, both regimes of law are corruptible or "pervertible." A justice that refused to translate itself into conditioned reality would generate a nightmarish obverse of its own best intent. But a law that refused to let itself be continuously indicted by an unconditional justice would soon become a mere tool or instrument of power. This "pervertibility" is also constitutive and cannot be eliminated. The paradoxes of the problem of justice per se, as opposed to dilemmas or conflicts of rights and duties within the regime of law, derive from this structural or formal paradox between an unconditional justice and conditional law.

A "just" practice would have to bear or endure the paradoxes of the problem of justice. In "Force of Law," Derrida elaborates the kind of bearing or endurance that would be needed, calling it an "experience of aporia":

> When I say that [the problems of justice] require the very experience of aporia, I mean two things. (1) As its name indicates, an experience is a tra-versal, something that *traverses* and travels toward a destination for which it finds the appropriate passage. The experience finds its way, its passage, it is possible. And in this sense it is impossible to have a full experience of aporia, that is, of something that does not allow passage. An aporia is a non-road. From this point of view, justice would be the experience that we are not able to experience . . . (2) I think that there is no justice without this experience, however impossible it may be, of aporia. Justice is an experience of the impossible. A will, a desire, a demand for justice whose structure wouldn't be an experience of aporia would have no chance to be what it is, namely, a call for justice. (FL 16, Derrida's italics)

Justice has to go through an experience of non-passage, it must bear this ordeal, if it would be justice and not merely a dutiful legality. Law passes through its dilemmas by calculating, by putting rights and duties on the scales and reading off the result; it subsumes particular cases into examples,

in order to derive a good rule, and it then applies that good rule and its examples to other particular cases. Where rules collide, law looks around until it finds another applicable rule, one that will enable it to make its calculation. But justice would have to be different than that: "Law is the element of calculation, and it is just that there be law, but justice is incalculable, it requires us to calculate with the incalculable; and aporetic experiences are the experiences, as improbable as they are necessary, of justice, that is to say of moments in which the decision between just and unjust is never insured by a rule" (FL 16).

But the "impossible" experience of aporia, sometimes called the moment of "undecidability," does not end, as some critics contend, in "quasi-nihilistic abdication" before the problem of justice, however (FL 19). The undecidable is not, cannot be, a refusal to decide. There must be a moment of decision, after all: for "only a decision is just" (FL 24). A just decision cannot merely be the application of a rule, nor can it recklessly ignore the rules that exist. We are rather commanded to somehow or in some way invent a new rule and example for each case, and to do so "justly"—in the spirit of, letting ourselves be guided by our desire for, unconditional, infinite, gracious justice. We are to perform a "reinstituting act of interpretation, as if ultimately nothing previously existed of the law" (FL 23). We are to reinvent the law, reform, and transform it by our decision, but without destroying the laws utterly, without damaging the benefit of the "rule of law," even in its conditioned inadequacy. This would mean, minimally, that we refuse to merely settle for the application of a rule, legal formula, or calculation. The imperative of justice is always to go beyond the law, as far in the direction of unconditional justice as the situation will bear. How much can any situation bear? No rule can help us here: this precisely is the calculation with "the incalculable," the moment of decision in a deconstructionist ethics. This is the "aporetic" between deconstruction's "double movement": this is "its privileged site—or rather its privileged instability" (FL 21). Undecidability, then, is a moment of deferral, not a refusal. It defers the moment of decision until after the structural aporias have been clarified and "experienced," for each singular case, each uniquely unsubsumable situation. Only in this way can we hope to understand what an ethico-political decision means or involves or what is at stake in it. "A decision that did not go through the ordeal of the undecidable would not be a free decision, it would only be the programmable application or unfolding of a calculable process. It might be legal; it would not be just" (FL 24).

Perhaps, what is most unnerving is that this ethical scrupulousness, this ordeal of an impossible "straddling" of the conditional and the unconditional, cannot wait for the luxury of full and perfect knowledge or the time to assimilate, process, and work through all the relevant contexts, for

the "urgencies" that assail us demand from us an urgent and hurried response:

> To be direct, simple and brief, let us say this: a just decision is always required *immediately*, "right away." It cannot furnish itself with infinite information and the unlimited knowledge of conditions, rules or hypothetical imperatives that could justify it. And even if it did have all that at its disposal, even if it did give itself the time, all the time and the necessary facts about the matter, the moment of *decision*, *as such*, always remains a finite moment of urgency and precipitation. (FL 26, Derrida's italics)

This impossible justice, this impossible demand of justice, this "responsibility without limits" is, Derrida admits, a kind of madness. "And so we can recognize in it, indeed accuse, identify a madness. And perhaps another sort of mystique" (FL 25). Without falling headlong into crude reductions or conflations, we can recognize a similar madness in other textual or theoretical endorsements of impossible ethical duties, utopian demands, or unbearable aporias, for instance those of Benjamin, Adorno, or Levinas. But nothing is madder, perhaps, than the aporia Derrida calls "the urgency that obstructs the horizon of knowledge": this impossible need to respond at once, as responsibly as possible but above all immediately, without delay, with a "decision of urgency and precipitation, acting in the night of non-knowledge and non-rule" (FL 26).

Having at least approached this madness and impossibility that Derrida claims for the name of justice, as the "spirit" of a justice that exceeds law and legality, we can return to the question of hospitality and begin to recognize that its stake is a form of the problem of justice. Hospitality concerns our response to the other, the stranger or foreigner, ultimately difference as such: heterogeneity or alterity. The stranger arrives at the border of our territory, at the door or threshold of our home. What do we do? How do we greet and receive the stranger? The laws of hospitality, as we know them, are conditional: they constitute a relation of symmetry and exchange, a field of reciprocal rights and duties. As the stranger arrives, the law (in the person of its enforcing arm, the police or border patrol) responds with a demand: Who are you?, What is your family name?, Where is your passport? How can you prove that you have status, that you are a legal person, are liable, can dependably claim rights and perform duties, and so on? Depending on the stranger's answer or papers, the law proceeds to classify the new arrival according to its rules: the stranger is legal or "illegal," approved or rejected for visitation or naturalization, allowed entry, detained, or turned back. All this and more would constitute legal, conventional hospitality as decreed and enforced by the state: the conditional laws of hospitality. But *the* law of hospitality would be unconditional, infinite, gracious, aneconomic, and so on. It would oblige us to welcome the new arrival unconditionally,

beyond the exchange of rights and duties and beyond the law's force of exclusion. It would command us

> to say yes *to who or what turns up*, before any determination, before any anticipation, before any *identification*, whether or not it has to do with a foreigner, an immigrant, an invited guest, or an unexpected visitor, whether or not the new arrival is the citizen of another country, a human, animal, or divine creature, a living or dead thing, male or female.[9]

The unconditional law of hospitality would have us offer the stranger a hospitality without limit. It tells us to keep a place at our table for her, him, or it, even to proffer our own place (the "place" one holds as placeholder, or the territory one "occupies") and to do so without any prior demand or interpretation of the arrival's intent and without any expectation of return or debt or even gratitude or safety. This kind of mad or impossible hospitality would begin to look, Derrida suggests, like the "enigma" of love.[10] Unconditional hospitality, like justice, like forgiveness, like gift-giving in the strictest sense, is not without an enigmatic relation to what we call love.

In the Paris seminar, Derrida explores these aporias—which are basically, he says, forms of one single aporia—and marks the difficult place of decision between an unconditional and a conditioned hospitality. He does so through meticulous readings of passages from Plato's *Sophist*, *Statesman*, *Apology of Socrates*, and *Crito*, from Sophocles' *Oedipus at Colonus*, and from the books of *Genesis* and *Judges*. These readings are supplemented with discussions of Kant, Benveniste, and Levinas, and of Pierre Klossowski's *Robert ce soir*, among other texts and figures; they are brought to bear on some of the thorniest issues we face today—for example the accelerated blurring of traditional distinctions between public and private since the advent of the telephone, fax, e-mail, the Internet, and "all those other prosthetic apparatuses of television and telephonic blindness."[11] In one of the seminar text's many moments of illumination, Derrida expresses his practice, the search for a just practice, as a multiplication "of two-way journeys, a to-and-fro between the matters of urgency that assail us at this end-of-millenium, and the tradition from which we receive the concepts, the vocabulary, the axioms that are elementary and presumed natural or untouchable."[12] The just or responsible reception of "the heritage," of the multiple traditions and haunted legacies to which we are heirs, is a critical practice—call it deconstruction or "hyper-critique"—that is and must be oriented toward decisions and interventions in contemporary contexts of "urgency and precipitation."

*   *   *

We can now return to Derrida's talk to the writers about the Cities of Asylum. "What in effect," he asks, "is the context in which we have

proposed this new ethic or this new cosmo*politics* of the cities of asylum?"
The answer is obvious:

> Is it necessary to call to mind the violence which rages on a worldwide scale?
> Is it still necessary to highlight the fact that such crimes sometimes bear the
> signature of state organizations or of non-state organizations? Is it possible to
> enumerate the multiplicity of menaces, of acts of censorship (*censure*) or of
> terrorism, of persecutions and of enslavements in all their forms? The victims
> of these are innumerable and nearly always anonymous, but increasingly they
> are what one refers to as intellectuals, scholars, journalists, and writers—men
> and women capable of speaking out (*porter une parole*)—in a public domain
> that the new powers of telecommunication render increasingly formidable—
> to the police forces of all countries, to the religious, political, economic, and
> social forces of censorship and repression, whether they be state-sponsored or
> not. Let us not proffer an example, for there are too many; and to cite the best
> known would risk sending the anonymous others back into the darkness
> (*mal*) from which they find it hard to escape, a darkness which is truly the
> worst and the condition of all others. If we look to the city, rather than to the
> state, it is because we have given up hope that the state might create a new
> image for the city. (OCF 5–6)

The context is that of neoliberal globalization and its discontents, the
victims of which increasingly include writers, artists, and intellectuals. In
the foreground are the tough new immigration controls across "Fortress
Europe" and the return of a chauvinist, right-wing politics of hatred. We
will have to consider the accents of Derrida's description more closely. But
our detour through the problem of justice and its aporias, its madness and
impossibility, has at least helped us to understand what would be involved
in the "genuine innovation" Derrida is calling for: the "renewal of interna-
tional law" that would disturb the "inviolable rule of state sovereignty";[13]
the "reorientation" of the politics of the state in the direction of a generous
and unconditioned hospitality; the reformation–transformation of the
relation between the city and the state that the Cities of Asylum network
would hope to put in place or play. The numerous and autonomous cities
of refuge would be "as independent from each other and from the state *as
possible*" (OCF 4, my italics).

Within this "as possible," we would find the enormous linguistic, cultural,
political, and bureaucratic difficulties that would have to be negotiated and
overcome to institute and realize such a program. And at the same time this
independence or autonomy would have to be highly sensitive, flexible, and
diplomatic, willing to compromise and make ad*just*ments. For this network
that straddles civil society and different levels of the state in a new and
innovative way could not be autonomous to the point of isolation or
solipsism. It would have to be sufficiently linked and committed to the

conventions of contact and exchange, and even of funding and accountability, to be able to find and keep a place in the network and in the city, in order to facilitate the "invention" of future forms of solidarity. We can imagine the difficulties "on the ground," the misapprehensions, doubts, mistakes, and worries involved in welcoming and offering sanctuary to these writer-strangers who probably speak or write in a foreign tongue, who would have to pass through the stern juridical filter that guards the border, and who may well be personally traumatized by the violence that put them to flight. And yet the impressive fact is: the Cities of Asylum network exists and is working.

If, in the spirit of justice, we now pose some critical questions, it is not to find fault with the writers or the IPW; their accomplishment clearly deserves our admiration and support. But there are two different justifications of the Cities of Asylum in play. One, the one we have been reading in Derrida's texts, situates the hope and throw of the project within the traditions of hospitality, cosmopolitanism, and international humanitarian law and seeks to recover, renew, and extend what is best and most just in those traditions. The other justification, the one that makes its appearance in the words "autonomous" and "independent" and is legible at many textual levels on the IPW website,[14] appeals to a tradition of intellectual and artistic autonomy. This tradition, while also old and pedigreed, is not as old as the traditions Derrida chose to invoke instead. The origins of artistic and intellectual autonomy are more or less contemporaneous with those of capitalism and the culture of bourgeois liberalism. Freedom of conscience and expression, as things we think of and claim as inviolable human rights, are, to be sure, fruits of the Enlightenment (as is cosmopolitanism in its Kantian form). But their "originary" links to a capitalist political economy survive in the form of a self-serving neoliberal discourse of "freedom." The project of "human rights," as noble and necessary as it is, continues to be exposed to "pervertibility" and instrumentalization in ways that are all too familiar and which it is part of deconstruction's job to unmask. Any discourse of artistic or intellectual freedom risks being conflated with or absorbed by this globalizing neoliberal sales pitch and perverted by motivated misconstrual.[15]

In the context of the Cities of Asylum, there are both advantages and disadvantages, therefore, in the appeal to artistic and intellectual autonomy. Such autonomy or freedom, however problematized it may be today, remains a condition of enlightenment and, therefore, of justice. But, it does pose some conflicts that it would be necessary for the IPW to acknowledge and address. There is an assumption, that certainly does not lack good grounds, that the freedom of writers, artists, and intellectuals to express themselves as they see fit and to address themselves to whomever they

choose is exemplary of the freedom of conscience as such and, therefore, one of the most basic and inalienable human rights. Writers, artists, and intellectuals have the power of the word and image: they can bear witness and, via their institutionalized channels, address their testimony to the public at large in ways that most members of that public share only in theory. We can clearly see the benefit and the urgency of protecting these ways and voices. The writer in the City of Asylum can, at least potentially, inform the world of an unfolding human catastrophe, in a way that could help, practically and concretely, his or her compatriots in their plight and that, again at least potentially, could help us all to become more cosmopolitan and just. But if the writer's power and proper competence is exemplary and crucial to justice and the public good, it is also a privilege—the result of education and opportunities that most do not enjoy. That privilege and the injustice of the division of labor behind it conspicuously survive in the Cities of Asylum. For every writer to which the network extends its sanctuary and solidarity, how many others, who are not writers or intellectuals, are left behind or, in the worst case, abandoned to that "darkness" of forgetting of which Derrida wrote?

This difficult question—that of the power to decide, at the extreme, who will be saved and who abandoned—would seem to be the most critical and urgent one that we could pose about the Cities of Asylum. It could be reformulated as a series of questions about the rules that guide the approach to the moment of "decision." What are the criteria that will "condition" the choices and decisions of the IPW in administering the cities? How will it decide which situations are most urgent, which writers are to be plucked from which context of violence and coercion? Must they be personally in danger? Or merely censored, or merely threatened by censorship? The IPW insists, necessarily no doubt, on its political neutrality, on the nonaligned, nonpartisan humanitarian status of its project. Yet, the implication is also unmistakable that the writers in danger are endangered for reasons that, in their individual contexts, would have to be understood as political. Must the writers then be political dissidents, religious heretics, or members of persecuted ethnic minorities? Does it matter whose truth they express, at the same time that they express their own? And does solidarity itself require that they address, in their words and work, the crisis from which they are delivered? These questions are difficult but not unanswerable: the IPW has answered and will continue to answer them with singular "decisions." So far, the IPW Secretariat seems to have been able to make its decisions freely, with sovereignty—and largely in secret.

Again, this is not to find fault, but rather to offer the critical and theoretical solidarity that it is proper, here, to offer. The clarification of such

criteria, and more disclosure about the process by which they are developed and adjusted, would go far to put skeptics and potential allies at ease and would strengthen the network as an institution. This gain in permanency and legitimacy would, to be sure, come at the cost of some autonomy and flexibility. But as Derrida has helped us to see, *total* procedural transparency would not be just either, for it would reduce the moment of decision to the application of a set of rules. Whereas ultimately, the moment of decision, if it would be just, would still have to pass through an ordeal of impossibility in which no rule can buy passage and in which the existing rules will have to be reinvented, as if from scratch, each time. Aporia again and again.

* * *

The urgencies, in response to which the IPW founded the Cities of Asylum and Derrida wrote the texts we have read here, have since then only become more urgent. Today, the neoliberal world order is in crisis, the global hegemonic consensus it once enjoyed is now disintegrating and its superpower and military guarantor growing increasingly isolated as it commits itself to a course of perpetual preemptive war. At the center of things, in more ways than one, is a grim and bitter conflict between stateless Palestinians and an Israeli government that imposes its will through force and urbicide in the Occupied Territories. It is testimony to the IPW's deepening commitment and growing stature that it "decided" that the urgency of this situation was insufferable and that it required the writers to make a collective intervention. An appeal for peace was issued, expressing solidarity with the civilians affected and calling for UN involvement, for the end of occupation, and for the resumption of negotiations.[16] In late March 2002, a delegation of IPW members—including IPW President Russell Banks, Breyten Breytenbach, Italian novelist Vincenzo Consolo, Chinese poet Bei Dao, Spanish novelist Juan Goytisolo, IPW Executive Director Christian Salmon, Portugese novelist José Saramago, and Wole Soyinka—visited the Occupied Territories. There they met Palestinian and Israeli writers and artists, waited in lines at the checkpoints, and saw for themselves the deteriorating conditions of life. Reports and journals of the visit were published widely in newspapers and periodicals, were issued as a book and posted on the IPW website.[17] The IPW's associated efforts to provide "concrete solidarity," as Salmon puts it, also included making space on its website available to Palestinian poet Mahmoud Darwish and other (mostly Palestinian) writers who wished to "provide evidence of the situation," as well as installing a "hyperlink" to the Palestinian journal *Al-Karmel*.

In "Force of Law," Derrida evokes Marx's eleventh thesis on Feuerbach and aligns himself with those who wished

> not to remain enclosed in purely speculative, theoretical, academic discourses but rather . . . to aspire to something more consequential, to *change* things and to intervene in an efficient and responsible, though always, of course, in a very mediated way, not only in the profession but in what one calls the *cité*, the *polis* and more generally the world. (FL 8–9, Derrida's italics)

We can agree with Derrida that the logic and dynamic of politicization cannot become total without undoing the conditions of justice: politics, as historical installation or performance, as realization rather than event-to-come, can, at best, be *responsible*, but can never be "just" in the strong utopian or "messianic" sense in which he asks us to think it. Still, we may wonder how stable or certain the "of course" of that passage can remain there today, as an apparently unquestionable condition or limit on the practice of intervention: "though always, *of course*, in a very mediated way." The IPW, responding with "decisions of urgency and precipitation" seems already to have pushed beyond it, with a just and impossible madness.

Working Out and Playing Through: Boaz Arad's Hitler Videos

> *Given the complete disenchantment of the world, art that is beyond the alternative of lightheartedness and seriousness may be as much a cipher of reconciliation as a cipher of horror.*
>
> —Theodor W. Adorno

The playfully serious and seriously playful work of Israeli video artist Boaz Arad poses crucial ethico-political questions about the limits to artistic confrontations with genocidal history and its legacies. What are our duties and responsibilities—as artists, critics, and spectators—with respect to representing the problems of trauma and mourning, of collective memory and identity, and of reconciliation and forgiveness? These problems are more urgent than ever today, as a dubious doctrine of perpetual preemptive "war on terror" throws international law into global crisis. Adorno had set down the theoretical baseline here, but the contemporary situation is very different from that of the post-1945 period in which he developed his "after-Auschwitz" ethic of representation. Understanding the historicity of Adorno's claims and imperatives is an unavoidable task for critical theory and aesthetics today. If Adorno's endorsement of severely "negative" artistic forms and practices attained a kind of belated dominance in the memorial art of the mid-1980s, it is no longer enough to simply apply his formulations as the source of conventionalized rules for production and criticism. It will be necessary to test those formulas against unfolding history and to scrutinize them through the interrogative force of contemporary practices. Arad's series of four short but potent videos constructed around images of Hitler gives us an opening to do just that.

Arad's videos began as interventions into a specific Israeli context. In a national culture in which, as historian Moshe Zimmerman puts it, "both the Shoa and anti-Semitism are instrumentalized in the interest of Israeli

policy,"[1] representations of the Nazi genocide are required to conform to official memory. They are limited to depictions of a moment of victimization by absolute evil, within a mythifying and recuperative narrative movement from diaspora to nationhood, powerlessness to power. The suffocating dogmatism of this civic religion, institutionalized relentlessly in schools and through public rituals, predictably produced a reaction: a so-called post-Zionist generation that can only view official memory with skepticism and irony and that is willing to ask critical questions about the ethical and political costs of the foundation of Jewish power and nationhood. Such questions are posed directly by Zimmerman, Idith Zertal, and other dissenting intellectuals—by the so-called New Historians, as well as by committed writers like David Grossman. The filmmaker Eyal Sivan, whose critical documentary work began in 1987, would also be aligned with this group. But such critical perspectives erupt rather late in gallery-based Israeli art. The 1997 exhibition of Roee Rosen's *Live and Die as Eva Braun* in the Israeli Museum in Jerusalem, is now recognized as its breakthrough. As Ariella Azoulay has clarified, Rosen's transgressive invocation of Hitler in a series of texts and drawings that invites the spectator to identify with his mistress broke the taboo on naming and depicting Hitler within the public spaces of Israeli museums and galleries. Azoulay helps us to see how Arad's videos, exhibited three years later at the Herzliya Museum of Art, were made possible by Rosen's intervention but also extended the space it opened up. As she puts it, Arad's work is "testimony to the change effected by Rosen's exhibition."[2] Together these works revealed Hitler as a "structured absence" in Israeli artistic and museological practice.[3]

It is instructive to see what happens when these interventionist works are submitted to contextual displacement. Both Rosen's Eva Braun suite and one of Arad's Hitler videos (*Hebrew Lesson*, 2000) were included in the controversial 2002 exhibition "Mirroring Evil: Nazi Imagery/Recent Art" at the Jewish Museum in New York.[4] There, in the fearful climate created by the September 11 attacks, and as violence in occupied Gaza and the West Bank continued to escalate under Ariel Sharon's policy of urbicide and military strangulation, the exhibition and the works in it became the objects of a shrill and near-universal condemnation.[5] It seems that in the US the space for a self-critical look at Jewish identity had closed up. Rosen's work and four of Arad's videos were again on view in Berlin in May 2003, in "Wonderyears," an exhibition of 23 post-Zionist Israeli artists.[6] Organized by a working group of the Neuen Gesellschaft für Bildende Kunst (NGBK)—a large artist-run collective that has, since its founding in 1969, been the source of a steady stream of socially and politically committed

projects and exhibitions—"Wonderyears" sought to deepen and complicate the public dialogue by installing self-critical Israeli representations of the Nazi genocide in the old capital of the perpetrators.

But beyond the fact that most of the work in this show emphatically refuses to accept the victim/perpetrator opposition as a timeless and frozen structure of collective identity, "Wonderyears" seemed to be in harmony with the German context. While anxieties about possible anti-Semitism have rightfully made it difficult in the past for Germans to find an ethico-political position and voice with which to be able to criticize Israeli policy, those inhibitions have largely been overcome as a European critical opposition to Sharon's hard line emerged in response to the growing misery and desperation of stateless Palestinians. Since the Bush doctrine and the preemptive war in Iraq opened up fissures in the transatlantic consensus about the role of the United States as self-appointed guarantor of the neoliberal world order, German public opinion and official policy have been largely in agreement about the importance of international law in restraining violence. More specifically, the German government and the public agree about the urgent need for third parties and international organizations to bring more pressure to bear, against U.S. resistance if need be, on Sharon's Likud-led government to end its repression and destruction in the Occupied Territories. Berlin, after all, is a city in which more than half a million people went to the trouble of telling their government to stay the course by filling the streets on February 15, 2003 during the lead-up to the invasion of Iraq. On the other hand, the quasi-institutionalization of self-critical remembrance in Germany, to which Adorno contributed, makes it likely that crude historical reductions or too-facile aesthetic gestures will not go unchallenged. Like everyone else, the Germans are still neurotic in their relation to history. But they are today markedly more conscious of their culture's crimes and failures than are the perennially self-congratulating spokespeople of other national cultures routinely put forward as models for the world. So in this context, circumstances seemed to offer up a kind of ideal audience for Rosen's and Arad's works: potentially critical and self-reflective, and relatively open and sympathetic.[7]

Having cursorily indicated how these works function in three different cultural and historical situations, I turn now to Arad's videos and analyze their specific gestures and aesthetic decisions, in order to then formulate some provisional conclusions about the challenge they pose to Adorno's ethic of representation. While I will clarify, by marking it explicitly as I go along, the extent of my reliance on two fine discussions of Arad's work—Ariella Azoulay's 2001 essay, revised for the "Wonderyears" catalog, and Joanna Lindenbaum's 2002 text for the catalog to "Mirroring Evil"—I hope to be able to sharpen

further the critical questions latent in the work by elaborating their relation to Adorno's critical theory and to the current political conjuncture.

*   *   *

Marcel Marcel and *Safam* (both 2000) should be read together, as a kind of video diptych. Both involve specific manipulations of the same segment of historical film footage of Hitler addressing a crowd. The time and place of that address is not disclosed in the titling and labeling apparatus and is likely to remain obscure (is it Nuremberg?) to those of us who are not professional historians of the Third Reich. Nor does the content of the spoken words seem to be as important as the status of the film fragment as an apparently transparent sign; the volume on the two pieces in the Berlin installation was loud enough to hear but too low to follow, and Azoulay reports that Arad in any case does not speak or understand German.[8] If that does not seem to matter, it is because the visual-acoustic sign no longer needs decipherable words. For either we have seen this footage of Hitler orating and gesticulating before, and heard his voice enunciating the distinctive cadences and glottal stops of the German language, or we have seen and heard footage like it. We instantly recognize the historical referent (Hitler and his Nazi context) behind the filmic signifier and hence instantly read the sign: here is the head of the Nazi regime, the man who plunged the world into war and authorized the systematic murder of millions of Jews, Roma and Sinti Gypsies, gays, leftists, and other "undesirables." Insofar as Hitler has come to stand for the personification of absolute evil, the sign already functions as a pre-interpreted figure or emblem. In almost any conceivable European, North American, or Israeli context in which this or similar footage could be introduced today, even the briefest citation would suffice to trigger a response conditioned by conventions that are culturally specific and ideologically loaded. We don't think or ask about film clips of Hitler when we are exposed to them; we react, in conventionalized ways, to "Hitler." In Israel—and again we have to thank Azoulay for clarifying this—filmic images of Hitler enter the public sphere in the very ritualized context of official remembrance: "Hitler's portrait appears in ritual fashion in the life of Israel once a year on Holocaust Day—on the flickering television screen, in short clips of documentary footage."[9] For Arad, who was born in 1956, and for many members of his and the following generation, such clips would have become familiar, visually and acoustically, through their function as markers of official memory. They would through repetition have acquired a density of association inseparably entangled in rituals of collective unification and national mobilization.

This would be the basic semantic charge, in Arad's Israel, of such footage as an available artistic raw material or found object. We know that the

choice to isolate and manipulate found material in an art context always involves the construction of a minimal critical distance. At the least, Arad's appropriation and displacement remove these historical images from the civic rituals in which they function and thereby call attention to that function itself. We would expect an ironic manipulation of such images to intensify the effect of critical distantiation. And ironic manipulation is precisely what is signaled by Arad's titular allusion to Marcel Duchamp's notorious *L.H.O.O.Q.* In that "assisted readymade," Duchamp treats a conventionalized emblem of beauty as a cultural *objet trouvé* and submits it to a demystifying double-irony. First the reproduction of the Mona Lisa is vandalized by the addition of a penciled-in moustache and beard. Then its beauty is despiritualized through the aura-puncturing pun of the title or caption. (Read aloud in French, the five letters become a sentence: "She's got a hot ass.") Arad extends the Duchampian gesture of ironic defacement over the whole 30-second duration of the appropriated film clip, in effect turning it into animation. But while Duchamp's wisecrack may have scandalized culturally conservative sensibilities and tendencies in 1920, the stakes of Arad's gesture are far higher: he is playing with the cultural memory of a traumatic history at a time when its instrumentalization provides the needed moral cover for the occupation of Gaza and the West Bank and may be the difference between suffering or a normal life for millions of people. On September 28 of the same year that Arad made and showed his videos, Sharon, in a brilliantly successful and appallingly cynical campaign ploy, deliberately provoked the Al-Aqsa Intifada by appearing, accompanied by hundreds of soldiers, at Jerusalem's Haram Al-Sharif. Since then, of course, the official hard line has led to an intensification of violence, which has in turn led to a regressive retrenchment of the Israeli majority around a mythified Jewish collective identity, thus spoiling post-Zionist hopes for two mixed and tolerant neighbor-states.

While the effects of an artistic intervention on Israeli national politics may be slight and difficult to evaluate, its character as an intervention is clear enough against the context sketched earlier. Its artistic gesture, following Rosen, is to further challenge the ban on visual interrogations of the structures of Jewish collective memory and identity within the Israeli museum. To realize his provocation, Arad relies on digital technology. The historical footage is digitalized, manipulated on a computer, and then transferred to video format for exhibition. As *Marcel Marcel* begins, the Nazi orator's signature moustache has already been replaced by two lines suggesting a black felt-tip pen. These lines are in constant flickering movement and transformation. First they wave like the wings of a bird. Then they grow out from the cheeks like vines, the two ends curling up flourishingly, but all the while remaining rooted under the Führer's nose and following every grandiloquent spasm of his orating head. The immediate

effect is to render both Hitler (the person actually filmed) and "Hitler" (a personification of evil that exceeds and transcends all attachment to historical specificity) ridiculous and slightly pathetic. As the short video work continues, the moustache lines thicken and become snake-like, one end rounding up and seeming to enter his ear. They extend and retract back to the smudge-like rectangle of the original model, which then detaches itself from the speaking face altogether to flit about like a fly in front of the offensive mouth. The artist's insult continues as the black line overgrows the upper lips, curls down over the wagging chin, and fills out into a beard, at first small but quite rapidly enough a big, full, and luxuriant one.

The resemblances the cartoon calls to mind at this point will depend on one's frame of reference. Azoulay sees in the beard a visual invocation of Theodor Herzl, the nineteenth-century founder of the Zionist movement.[10] If so, then neither Hitler nor the Zionist founding father escapes lampooning. It is moreover possible to see, in this quick-flickering beard, the specter of Marx, another Jewish *bête noire* for the Nazis. And as the beard retracts again, as it withdraws back into the chin, still wagging along in synch with the production of words, there appear flittingly the images of Castro and Guevara and by association all the rest of Marx's progeny of vigorous, bearded left-wing orators and uniformed revolutionaries. In this way, the defacement pushes all the fascist hot buttons while at the same time debunking the demagoguery of charismatic political address, from whatever point in the political spectrum. (Here the video also recalls, intentionally or not, John Heartfield's 1934 photomontage for the *Arbeiter-Illustrierte-Zeitung*, in which Goebbels tries to deceive the workers by fitting Hitler with Marx's beard.) The black lines retract again to the original model, Hitler's own trademark, which flickers beneath the nose in a gradually slowing alternation of presence and absence—a deadpan simulation of compulsive *fort-da*[11]—until finally it does not reappear. Another two seconds or so, in which the mark of erasure beneath the nose is clearly and disturbingly visible as a kind of nakedness, brings the work to a close. The pendant *Safam* (the word is Hebrew for "moustache") utilizes a longer, 44-second, segment of the same historical footage. But here, Arad has simply erased the moustache, turning down the volume of the irony but still inserting a critical distantiation through a kind of symbolic castration. For as Azoulay points out, what Rosen's work had succeeded in showing three years earlier was that the signifier of the sign "Hitler" was nothing other than that peculiar black rectangle.[12]

* * *

Hebrew Lesson (2000) also utilizes historical footage, but here the manipulation is more obsessive and the *détournement* more radically demolitional.

After digitalizing film clips of Hitler speaking in various times and places, Arad broke them down into fragments based on the smallest isolable acoustic units of speech. He then tried to recombine these acoustic units, indifferently to the visual images corresponding to them, in such a way that Hitler seems to speak the Hebrew words "*Shalom Yerushalayim, Ani mitnatzel.*" ("Greetings, Jerusalem. I am sorry."—or, in Lindenbaum's rendering, "I am *deeply* sorry.")[13] The result is uncanny and forcefully effective even in its failure. We see a 5-second edited sequence of 10 historical fragments, repeated continuously. While Hitler is the speaker at the center of each one, the sequence follows no consistent visual logic of scale, camera angle, or editing tempo. Visually, they veer and lurch by like bad jump cuts. As it gradually becomes clear that the editing obeys a vocal logic of the spoken phoneme, attention is shifted to the words themselves. One can, after listening with concentration several times, begin to recognize the first two words, *Shalom Yerushalayim*. The rest, for me at least, remained obscure and, even with the text in hand, dubious. Hebrew speakers report similar problems.[14] And that would in fact seem to be Arad's point. After much effort—"meticulous" and "painstaking" are two words that both Azoulay and Lindenbaum use to describe Arad's editing process[15]—the Hebrew lesson still failed. Arad was unable, after all, to "teach" Hitler to enunciate a clear apology in the language of his Jewish victims.

Or was the lesson doomed to fail even before it began? For the questions this short video poses through its *Trauerspiel* ("mourning play")[16] would seem to be more anguished and profound than those put by *Marcel Marcel* and *Safam*. Jacques Derrida has recently taught us to recognize the problem of forgiveness as one that is almost always contained within a conventionalized economy of reciprocal exchange. Forgiveness, he shows us, is typically granted conditionally: it is given, if it is given at all, in return for the recognized expressions of remorse and contrition—confession, apology, compensation, or restitution. But Derrida challenges us to think of a forgiveness that would be unconditional, that would escape or exceed the conditioned, limited, economic circuits of negotiated exchange. In the context of an essay that struggles with the difficulties involved in classifying the offense of the Nazi genocide as well as the stakes and risks of the South African truth and reconciliation process, Derrida proposes that such a forgiveness—unlimited, infinite, gracious—could only be the forgiveness of the unforgivable (OCF 32–3). Moreover, without the impossible possibility of such an unconditional forgiveness, as a kind of continuous ethical pressure on concrete situations, the lesser, conditioned forgiveness we normally rely on would collapse into a merely economic transaction emptied of any ethical meaning.

Arad's 5-second video, in which he tries but fails to teach the demonized perpetrator to apologize in the victim's language, points to the limits of conventionalized forgiveness. So long as reconciliation is confined to the

circuits of an economy in which forgiveness requires remorse, then the evasion of Hitler's suicide will suffice to perpetuate a double bind. For, if the only way out of a traumatic memory, carefully transmitted from generation to generation, is through an apology that will never be uttered, then the families of victims and survivors will remain locked up in their victimhood. Frustration at this result leads to the denial of the aporia: the Nazi genocide is simply declared unforgivable and its unforgivability transferred in perpetuity. This option opens the way for the victim culture to claim the power of violence for itself, and to sanctify its claim in an effort to erase the shame of victimhood even while maintaining it as a founding stone of identity. The consequence of these moves is that the former victims are blinded to their own potential to become perpetrators in the here and now. Without trivializing either the horror of the crime of genocide or the difficulty of forgiving it, *Hebrew Lesson* refuses the easy, ritualized solutions that structure the Israeli civic religion.

* * *

A fourth video, *Loop*, made in 2001, continues to explore these problems plotted through the figure of Hitler, but marks a departure from the use of historical documentary film. In *Loop*, we see a bare-chested man, presumably the artist, posing before the camera in a Hitler mask. Aside from the use of the mask, all semblance is apparently refused. The figure, obviously not Hitler, stands in what appears to be a study or studio, before a wall of shelves loaded with books and video cassettes. The transparently clumsy "staging" discloses the fiction of the masked pose and makes its status and performance available for critical scrutiny. Heightening the ridiculousness of this set up are the details of the masked figure: the hairy, middle-aged torso straining the waist of the blue jeans, the ordinary looking watch on the wrist of the left arm. The figure performs a sequence of actions, in a segment that lasts about a minute and is then continually looped. Standing at an oblique angle to the camera with his arms folded on his chest, he slowly flexes his right arm in the classic strongman gesture, then approaches the camera until the left eye behind the mask peers into and nearly makes contact with the camera lens. He then withdraws, resumes the arm flex, and finally returns to the original cross-armed stance. It is unclear, to me at least, whether the second half of the sequence is actually performed or is simply the approach to the camera put into reverse motion by technical means.

The status of the mask as the marker of a fiction is nowhere more glaring than in the gaps between the mask and the face beneath it that become visible around the eye apertures during the final approach to the camera. But the fact is that this status is never in question or doubt at any time during

the video. Arad's "acting-out" is presented as such, and as nothing else. The question, then, is not "what is Hitler doing there?" It is rather "what does it mean to play 'Hitler'?" Or better yet: what does it mean for an Israeli to pose himself in a "Hitler" mask, or even more specifically, for *this* Israeli artist to do this in Tel Aviv in 2001 and ask us to receive it as a work of art? "Life," Adorno wrote about the contemporary world in a 1951 essay, "transforms itself into the ideology of reification—actually the mask of death" (CCS 25/30). Arad's video would demystify the ideological reification of the historical Hitler into the demonized "Hitler." It would evoke all the complex functions of "Hitler" within the twists and turns of an instrumentalized collective memory and condense them into the figure of the mask—a death's head, "actually the mask of death." In distilling all of this—the ideological "branding" of Hitler—into this empty thing, the mask itself, *Loop* would unmask and de-reify "Hitler." And of course, it cannot succeed in that ambitious aim through such a facile gesture. What it can and does do is to return us to these difficulties as unresolved problems of Jewish identity and the logic of the victim–perpetrator dyad. We can moreover assume that this video—made after the eruption of the second Intifada and Sharon's election (in effect a popular mandate for a military hard-line) but perhaps before the bloody consequences of those votes had fully unfolded—carried a specific critical force in its original Israeli context.

In Berlin, *Loop* was installed in the large streetfront display window of the bookstore that serves as the entrance into the NGBK galleries, where "Wonderyears" and Arad's other videos were on view. It should be pointed out that this gallery on Oranienstraße 25 is in the middle of Berlin-Kreuzberg, a feisty, ethnically diverse, and traditionally left-wing neighborhood notorious for its *Antifa* (antifascist) sentiment and for the insubordination and violent anarchistic excess of its annual May Day riots. Passing by around midnight on the opening night of the exhibition, I saw a group of six young adults on the sidewalk, watching Arad's video through the window. To all appearances, they were thoroughly amused. What the quality of that amusement was, and whether it was linked up to any kind of critical reflection, is anyone's guess. Art can pose its questions, but the risk of misfires as it passes into more generalized public spaces is, like the risk of an inadequate reception, irreducible.

* * *

In the 1966 *Negative Dialectics*, in the unfinished *Aesthetic Theory* and in numerous shorter critical texts, Adorno wrestled with the implications of Auschwitz for art and philosophy. That autonomous art and high culture had been impotent to prevent the genocidal eruption was for Adorno

a failure that calls into question art's very right to exist. The catastrophe of fascism, together with the "perennial catastrophe" of a social order in which the conditions that made fascism possible persist in the present, make a mockery of the traditional justifications for artistic autonomy. To pick up this ruined and discredited tradition of high culture after Auschwitz would be to become an accomplice. But to refuse to do so would be no less barbarous, for however feeble and indicted art is, it remains one of the last points of imaginable resistance to the barbarism of the status quo. For Adorno, only an art as severe as Samuel Beckett's could successfully bear this aporia. He developed his "after-Auschwitz" ethic of representation in a sustained critical engagement with Beckett's *Endgame*. Just as philosophy after Auschwitz would have to learn to think through a negative dialectics that refused metaphysical optimism and its profitable positivities, art would have to change itself into a negative art of refusal: it would have to renounce all links with the beautiful and empty itself of all traditional forms of aesthetic pleasure. In representing the catastrophes of history and contemporary life, art must not name or represent the disaster directly: only "negative presentations"—indirect, oblique, or sublime forms of evocation and avowal—are permitted. Only an art that is rigorously austere and resistant in this way would be equal to the demands of the disenchantment Auschwitz left in its wake.

Adorno, who died in 1969, tried to keep his thinking open to contemporary developments. But in truth his cultural horizon did not extend much beyond continental Europe. Nor were there any real hints of awareness, in his great reflections on working-through the past, that the memory of Auschwitz could be instrumentalized by a victim culture and invoked to silence criticism of its own perpetrations of state. The actualization of this possibility today surely effects Adorno's ethico-aesthetic strictures. It must at the very least put in question the relevance of those strictures for an Israeli context. This observation itself helps us to see the crucial importance of national and cultural context—something that Adorno, who tended to treat art as a primarily structural predicament that produced its meanings and effects as if floating freely above the more localized specificities of context and territory, did not underscore. This suggests that as the networks of global exchange continue to thicken and as the art world continues to be the locus of an evermore routinely transnational institutionalized activity, artists will have to assume that their interventions, necessarily aimed locally, will thereafter be displaced to other contexts. This likelihood (what Derrida calls "iterability") and the questions it raises about the possibilities of a global, cosmopoliticized artistic language will be increasingly reflected in works and practices.

With respect to Arad's videos, I have tried to show that his work, seen in context, exhibits an admirable ethical responsibility and political commitment. That said, it produces its effects in ways that could be read, in Adorno's terms, as highly offensive to the memory of the victims. But beyond the fact that the instrumentalization of that memory problematizes such a formulation, with Arad we are dealing with a provocation that challenges the opposition between playful and serious forms of practice that along with others structures Adorno's aesthetics. The champion of *Endgame* held that art must now renounce lighthearted playfulness: "The statement that it is not possible to write poetry after Auschwitz does not hold absolutely, but it is certain that after Auschwitz, because it was possible and remains possible into the unforeseeable future, lighthearted art is no longer conceivable."[17] Citing, in 1967, his own 1951 ban on lyric poetry, Adorno concedes that this ban is not absolute: art must go on and give voice to suffering. But in this aporetic post-Auschwitz situation, lightness (*Heiterkeit*: playfulness, cheerfulness) remains impossible: "Objectively, it degenerates into cynicism, however much it would like to rely on the goodness of human understanding" (pp. 603–04/251).

Arad's videos are a counterexample to Adorno here, for without denying that their possible offensiveness remains a problem, it seems clear enough that they are not reducible to cynicism. Seen in context, they are classic works of enlightenment. They perform (insofar as art can: it is not, after all, theory even when it is not theoretically naive) a tense alliance between demystifying ideology critique and the work and play of mourning. If they are playful, they play a deadly serious game. If they are lighthearted, that heart is also heavy and risks passing over into melancholy. Adorno himself sometimes seemed to be oblivious to the risk that the emphasis, in his ethico-aesthetics, on the need for art's self-denial, hardness, and discipline might align it, against its own best impulses, with a dangerous logic of purity. Arad's aesthetic decisions would seem to have taken this risk into account. The imperative not to offend the memory of past victims—either through representational forms that trivialize their suffering by turning it into aesthetic pleasure or ones that offend by making sense of its hard core of inassimilable trauma—is undeniable. But it cannot have priority over the more urgent imperative to resist injustice unfolding in the here and now. In the difficult choice between those claims, Arad has chosen responsibly. In the face of the instrumentalization of memory, of its enlistment by official domination, there is no way to resist or criticize the status quo without giving offense to some. But the real offense is that of the engineers and politicians of that instrumentalization—those who have linked that memory to a new ideology of blood and land. This holds just as much for those on the

Palestinian side who have perversely constructed the mirror image of this ideology, even if the gross asymmetries of power within the current context of struggle makes their cause a just one.

At the end of the 1967 essay from which I've been citing, Adorno begins to glimpse the possibility of an art that goes beyond the traditional distinction between seriousness and lightness: "In view of the recent past, art can no more be completely serious than it can still be lighthearted. One begins to doubt whether art was ever as serious as culture had convinced people it was" (pp. 606/253). Here we read Adorno struggling to keep his aesthetics open to the future, to what Derrida calls the "event" or "arrival"—those unforeseeable and unpredictable mutations of art that would rupture the context of prevailing conventions. In the conclusion of "Is Art Lighthearted?" Adorno's formulations begin to reach beyond any ossified opposition between serious and less than serious art. A negative dialectic of seriousness and non-seriousness begins to emerge as the "impossible" passage of a solution-in-process that would exceed the closure of any resolution. The movements of such a dialectic open the space for an art, like Arad's, that sheds the traditional opposition through the commitments of its gesture:

> The art that moves ahead into the unknown, the only art now possible, is neither lighthearted nor serious; the third possibility, however, is cloaked in obscurity, as though embedded in a void the figures of which are traced by advanced works of art. (pp. 606/253)

What is touched upon here is one of the most delicate problems encountered in these investigations: that of the appropriate tempo or rhythm of mourning. Politicized mourning is the collective processing of catastrophic history all the way down to the structural barbarism that made such history possible. Today, under conditions of global immanence, this means: cosmopoliticized mourning. But such a mourning cannot be solely the rigor of unrelieved critique and confrontation. Moments of confrontation must sometimes be alternated with more reconciliatory moments in order not to become counterproductive; forcing or rushing provokes bad resistance and regression. And there must be a bearable variance between the work and play of mourning, between *Trauerarbeit* and *Trauerspiel*. This variance would keep the pressure on concrete situations precisely by means of varying the forms and intensity of reflection. It would also need to site itself strategically within a radical politics that must necessarily break with the officially constructed (neo)liberal consensus and remain "not reconciled," to cite the title of Danièle Huillet and Jean-Marie Straub's still relevant 1965 film. Little more can be said in the abstract about how this is judged or best attained; the decisions it requires involve what Derrida calls

"incalculables." In this light, "working-through" means: working and playing through the blockages to critical thought—interminably, creatively, and cunningly refusing every final resolution. To seek a just tempo of mourning would have less to do with any rigidified choice between seriousness and non-seriousness than with a commitment to keep the critical movement moving within the contextual specifics of unfolding ethico-political situations. As Arad shows us, what is called art can still be this spur or pressure.

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Listening with the Third Ear: Echoes from Ground Zero

The preemptive war in Iraq is over. Or is it? And the Bush doctrine has been vindicated. Or has it? The attacks of September 11, 2001, and the Bush government's "war on terror" have both united and divided Americans. And as readers of this journal know,[1] the doctrine of preemptive attack has even deepened splits within the dissenting left. It is not yet clear which criteria—which ethical, political, and legal languages and logics—will win control over the evaluation of the new intervention and its consequences. The token "coalition of the willing" notwithstanding, the widest split of all is the one that has opened up between the United States and the rest of the world.

September 11 changed the political landscape. Everyone agrees on that. The arguments are about what that change really is. For Mitchell Cohen, it has to do with the gravity of global threats and our awareness of them: "The threat of terror is real. Anyone who scoffs at it will lose moral and political credibility—and ought to."[2] Parts of the left and of the global antiwar movement have been denigrated or dismissed in these pages by contributors advancing some version of this argument.

Although I think I agree with Cohen's claim, I cannot do so without directing some critical questions to its formulation. For whom is "terror" a real threat? How must one acknowledge the "reality" of that threat? In whose eyes, exactly, do scoffers lose "credibility"? I have no wish to be glib. I am aware that Cohen can define these terms coherently and has deployed them in complex, cogently developed arguments. But I cannot help feeling that his support of the intervention in Iraq, as well as a great deal of the debate in these pages, both reflects and remains caught in a post-September 11 American psychology of fear. It may have credibility in a fearful American context, but from an internationalist and cosmopolitical perspective, it lacks a necessary distance.

I want to suggest that there is an implicit "we" in Cohen's claim and in these pages, and that this "we" marks precisely the point at which self-critique stops. The usually unacknowledged "we" is of course that of

"we Americans." It is not merely a matter of recurring calls for "leftist patriotism" on the model of World War II or condemnations, subtle or not, of "anti-Americanism." It rather seems to mark a limit imposed on internationalist and cosmopolitical premises: a limit on the ideas of universal justice and a universalized solidarity. I don't want to imply that every contributor to these pages shares this limiting "we," or that those who do share it do so to the same degree. But it is legible in every recent issue of this journal, and I need to ask my fellow leftists to consider it as a possible problem.

The threat of terror is real. But it was not the material reality that was changed by September 11, so much as a shared (U.S.) perception of existing threats which then itself became a new (U.S.) political reality. In the short term, of course, this political reality is a constraining one for U.S. politics. And it will obviously have immense consequences for the rest of world. That, I take it, is what Cohen refers to by "political credibility." But his claim also includes a notion of "moral credibility" that appeals not to the constraints of particular perceptions but to universal norms and standards. Cohen's claim does distinguish between the two; but I want to ask if, at the level of psychology and shared identity, they are not subtly conflated after all.

I'm aware of the usual objections to invoking the categories of psychology and identity. As soon as they come into play, we've left behind the assured positivities of logical and empirical proof, in which propositions can be invalidated in any strict sense. Psychology and identity nevertheless refer to real forces in the world—forces that are ignored at peril and are often behind the kinds of conflict in which the dilemmas of humanitarian intervention, debated so lucidly in the pages of *Dissent*, emerge most starkly.

The tradition of enlightenment for which this journal stands is premised on the possibility of progressive self-awareness and liberation from forms of prejudice. Inflected with a Freudian idiom, enlightenment is interminable analysis: the unending collective labor of working through narcissistic wounds and fantasies and a continual turning, through this effort of mourning, toward others and the world. "Reality-testing" and the revision of identity, individual and collective, are irreducible aspects of this process. Wounds, traumata, psychic scars: these mark points of repression, where inassimilable experience, painful knowledge, and threats to fantastic investments are forced back from consciousness. Enlightenment, understood in this way, is impossible until wounds are acknowledged and feelings fully articulated.

I want to suggest that the United States, as a nation and a people, was traumatized by the attacks of September 11, but not quite in the way most Americans believe. My argument here will be oblique.

"Official" categories imposed on public discourse about September 11 served to simplify the historically and culturally complex background of the

attacks and to block any critical reflection about their causes. The attacks were the work of "evildoers," and evil is a sufficient cause unto itself. Why did they do it? Because they are evil. More than crimes, the attacks were exceptional "acts of war" that demanded an exceptional response. A cooperative law enforcement or juridical response would not, by these terms, suffice. The response could only be military: "Infinite Justice." Anyone who questions this response would be categorized as an enemy: "Whoever is not with us is with the terrorists."

What is missing, for me, in the published dissections of this rhetoric and the interested opportunism it facilitated, is an appreciation for the wound and for the effects of the powerful feelings of fear and anger that it set loose. The wound has two dimensions. First, it punctured an assumption of American invulnerability and revealed a real limit to U.S. power: not even a superpower can protect its citizens from every kind of threat, even at home. Second, it punctured a cherished collective self-image. Americans have persisted in imagining themselves as the most virtuous and generous nation on earth, and yet the atrocious morning of September 11 revealed them to be targets of an intense hatred. The attacks did not just strike the symbols of U.S. power; they also struck the ground of American identity. Hence the traumatic disturbance. Even now, Americans remain, psychologically, in a very fragile state. Fear and anger are the dominant emotions, and they translate into bad, unenlightened politics.

There was, however, a moment in the weeks after the attacks in which a more complex response came to light. Spontaneously, Americans began to refer to the destroyed site of the World Trade Center complex in Manhattan as "ground zero." Whoever first used the term in this context, its dissemination and acceptance was rapid: the *New York Times* had begun using the term by September 16. Every kind of discourse, popular and official, took up the term, uncritically and without reservation.

To this day, the ambivalent post-September 11 meanings of this term have not been adequately remarked or analyzed. The term is technical in origin. It designates the point on the ground directly below a nuclear explosion. It was first used, according to the *OED*, in a 1946 *New York Times* report on the damage inflicted on the city of Hiroshima. These origins, moreover, are no secret. "Ground zero" and its links to Hiroshima recur quite often in histories, novels, and films. The notorious "Unit Four" of the censored 1995 *Enola Gay* exhibition at the National Air and Space Museum, which would have exposed millions of Americans to devastating photographs of the civilian victims of Hiroshima, was called "Ground zero." The term is an uncomfortable part of American public culture.

Something extremely profound and important, then, was trying to "say itself" in the quick acceptance of this term after September 11. The first

thing it says is how deeply Americans were hurt. The attacks hurt us as deeply, the term says, as the atomic bomb hurt the people of Hiroshima. The reference to an exemplary community of victims insisted that American pain and shock be recognized as terrible, as terribly great. This would be the "manifest" meaning of the term "ground zero" in this context.

But it says something more. For Americans insisted, through the term, in comparing themselves to a specific group of victims. They did not, that is, compare themselves to the most exemplary group of victims available— the victims of Nazi genocide. No, they compared themselves to the Japanese of Hiroshima. But what a strange choice that was. As a way of indicating the depth of their pain, they chose the people on whom the United States used the first nuclear bomb.

The "latent" or unconscious meaning of "ground zero" gradually becomes clear. It acknowledges, unconsciously, what the United States as a nation has long resisted acknowledging consciously and officially. What it "says" is that Americans *know*: they *know* that Hiroshima and Nagasaki were terrible crimes. They knew, even as they suddenly and horribly found themselves the target of an atrocious day of attacks, that their own government had, in their name, committed a great atrocity.

A momentous revelation: in the confusion of that traumatic disturbance, Americans found and grabbed tightly onto this term from the past, in order to claim for themselves a status of victimhood that would express the gravity of the injury and the extent of their pain. And yet they chose a term that could not say otherwise than that they too, in recent history, have been terrorists. For the attacks on the cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki were, even in the context of war, a quantum leap in the terror bombing of civilians.

It will not be necessary to rehearse here the long repression, in American memory, of Hiroshima, or the historian's debate about the official motives behind the decision to use the bomb, in order to recognize that this displacement of ground zero from Japan to Manhattan is a rejection of the gross simplifications of official post-September 11 rhetoric. For "Hiroshima" is crucially contested ground, a key term and irreducible point of reference for conflicting formations of American identity—for both the official identity, based on a mystifying account of the past and a notion of American moral exceptionalism, and alternatives to that identity, based on the critical processing of the past.

So the terms of U.S. public discourse unwittingly revealed the depth of American ambivalence and self-conflict. Unconsciously, Americans understand that the official image of their nation is based on a fantasy of special virtue that will not stand up to "reality" testing. But at the level of identity, post-September 11 American fear for personal safety merges with the fear of

confronting that fantasy. It obviously makes a great difference if people think of themselves as capable, like everyone else, of making terrible ethical mistakes, or if, instead, they continue to think of themselves as morally qualified, in a unique and exceptional way, to lead the world.

The weeks following September 11 were indeed weeks of decision: history had intervened on the normalized course of American life, not only demanding a response but also opening up an opportunity for a national reflection. For the trauma of the attacks was also an invitation to work through a shared past: to let go of and begin to mourn a fantasy of exception that was flattering but delusional, and, in accepting that burden and that task, to adjust the way the United States represents itself and acts in the world. This is what our friends in "old" Europe and the world keep waiting and hoping for.

What they got instead was, for example, determined resistance to the International Criminal Court and demands for special immunity for U.S. nationals. The underlying logic and its link to identity is perfectly clear. Premise one: Americans are good. Premise two: the good do not commit gross violations of human rights. Conclusion: Americans cannot possibly be guilty of crimes against humanity. Conclusion: indictments of Americans can only be "politically motivated."

Of course, it was probably too much to hope for that the unconscious revelation of the term "ground zero" could become fully conscious while the wound of September 11 was still fresh. Intense and widespread fear and anger made it all too easy for the Bush government to pursue a politics of simplification and moral exceptionalism. This analysis does help us to see, however, that the critical counter-memorial project of the American left—the belated and incomplete confrontation with the historical foundations of American exceptionalism that, in the 1980s, went by the name of the "culture wars"—can only facilely be dismissed as a form of "anti-Americanism." Is it not precisely its insistence on this project of testing American identity formations against historical and contemporary reality that so incenses many Americans about the domestic and international antiwar movement?

It moreover seems clear that Americans have not really appreciated—and this point may also apply to some contributors to *Dissent*—the extent to which the rest of the world no longer recognizes the moral and political authority the United States claims for itself. The broad sympathy extended to Americans after September 11 has been withdrawn, not because the world "scoffs" at the threat of terror, but because it finds the Bush doctrine of preemptive war an unacceptable threat to an international order that grounded mutual security on a shared rejection of war. The world doesn't trust a government that has thrown away the doctrine of the sovereign equality of all states and given itself permission to attack anyone, anywhere,

whom *it* deems a threat. The world thinks this government has done so not because it was necessary but because it had the power to: because it *could*.

It is for these reasons, that I have difficulties reading in these pages passing characterizations of World War II as an admirable antifascist struggle that should serve as a model for leftist patriotism and politics. It is not merely that the Bush government has fully exploited the selective American memory of that global conflict, using the "Good War" against the fascist axis as a template or script for the good "war on terror" against the "axis of evil." It is rather that an uncritical perspective on the "Good War" reinforces the myth of American moral exceptionalism and blocks the transition to a more enlightened identity formation. World War II was a just war, but the Allies did not always fight it with just means. The way the United States concluded that war, was a disastrous ethical and political failure that destroyed 300,000 predominantly civilian lives in two cities and left the world a legacy of trouble and terror. The United States has never been held accountable for that failure, and it officially refuses to hold itself accountable. Americans need to work through that legacy and their role in it, and critical intellectuals will have to lead that effort. Americans, moreover, should remember and reflect on the fact that Pearl Harbor is a classic example of a preemptive attack.

The official discourse insists that what is at stake, since September 11, is nothing less than national survival and "our way of life." I accept that violent non-state actors represent a real threat to an emerging global and cosmopolitical public sphere. But we can disagree, I hope, about how far they really threaten U.S. national survival and what to do about them. We are told, in effect, that our choice now is between perpetual preemptive war and suicide. I think this official choice lacks "credibility." I can accept that informed and well-intentioned people can hold such a position, but I can only reject it.

What to do? If not preemption, then what? If nuclear, chemical, and biological weapons are a grave and urgent threat (and they clearly are), then let's stop testing and producing them. Let's make the "strategic choice"—as Colin Powell, threatening the Iraqis, put it at the UN Security Council—to eliminate them, universally and not selectively. That would be an ethically and politically "credible" goal, consistent with the vision of "cosmopolitical democracy" advocated in these pages and elsewhere by Daniele Archibugi. In the end, a just global order can only emerge through a more equitable and democratic distribution of resources and benefits: although redistribution cannot pacify every hatred, it remains the soundest material basis for mutual security. But I cannot see that great project succeeding without a parallel critical project—without the deepening of self-critical enlightenment and the progressive transition to what Jürgen

Habermas has called "post-traditional identity" or loyalty to constitutional principles and inclusive forms of solidarity rather than to a particular and exclusive race, place, or people. Nowhere is that task more urgent today than in the world's only superpower. Clearly, such a reversal of the current course would not be achievable overnight. But as the analysis of the term "ground zero" indicates, there are at least some grounds for hope.

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Chapter Ten

Conditioning Adorno: "After Auschwitz" Now

> *That fascism lives on, that the oft-invoked working through of the past [Aufarbeitug der Vergangenheit] has to this day been unsuccessful and has degenerated into its own caricature, an empty and cold forgetting, is due to the fact that the objective conditions of society that engendered fascism continue to exist. Fascism essentially cannot be derived from subjective dispositions. The economic order, and to a great extent the economic organization modeled upon it, now as then renders the majority of people dependent upon conditions beyond their control and thus maintains them in a state of political immaturity [Unmündigkeit]. If they want to live, then no other avenue remains but to adapt, submit themselves to the given conditions; they must negate precisely that autonomous subjectivity to which the idea of democracy appeals; they can preserve themselves only if they renounce their self. To see through the nexus of deception, they would need to make precisely that painful intellectual effort that the organization of everyday life, and not least of all a culture industry inflated to the point of totality, prevents.*
>
> —Theodor W. Adorno (*WTP,* 139/98–9)

Already when Espen Hammer opened this conference two days ago, we agreed in advance about the fittingness of our meeting this morning on Adorno's hundredth birthday.[1] But if a shared concern for a certain "truth" and a certain "promise" has led us, over whatever paths, to become readers and students of the Frankfurt critical theorist, that same concern enjoins us to remember that September 11 also marks the destruction of democracy and the plunge into terror in Chile, in 1973. The rightwing coup d'état that murdered Salvador Allende and obliterated his elected government was, let's remember, covertly supported and probably triggered by the U.S. government and U.S. corporations, namely ITT. And of course this day, September 11, marks that more recent traumatic hit two years ago, which provided the pretext for a perpetual preemptive so-called war on terror—a war that has already rained bombs on the people of two countries and blasted away at international law and human rights. We'll see if this war

recoils, before it's over, on the dominant neoliberal world order. I begin in this way in order to underscore how premature pronouncements of the end of history, so comforting to the right wing a decade ago, have turned out to be. Indeed as we are convened here, people who evidently have not heard that history is over are engaged in disrupting the ministerial meeting of the World Trade Organization in Cancun. But I also begin this way because the capacity to hear the layered memorial rustling of dates is central to the reflections on the historical character of Adorno's "after-Auschwitz" ethic of representation that I offer you this morning.

Adorno's aesthetics, we know, powerfully combines Marxist ideology critique of cultural autonomy with a Benjaminian commitment to immanent immersion in singular works. Adorno advances the method he calls "emphatic" or "dialectical critique" in the programmatic 1951 essay "Cultural Criticism and Society" and elaborates it in the "Draft Introduction" to the posthumously published *Aesthetic Theory*. This "close alliance" of critical theory and work-immanent analysis recognizes "art's double character as both autonomous and *fait social*" (AT 16/5) and thus reveals the singular work as "the nexus of a problem" (AT 532/358). The two-handed or bifocal critical method breaks open the work as monad, digs out its entangled truth and untruth, and comprehends its constellation of moments and disjunctions together as a process or force field. Adorno's negative "truth" notion remains Marxist without apology: its utopian standard indicts the domination of the "social given." At the same time, it rebukes the positivist correspondence theory of truth as yet another debasement of reason into apologetics for "what is the case."

"Culture," for Adorno as for his Frankfurt School colleagues, encompasses all the forms of spirit (*Geist*) that push beyond the world as it now is—all the forms of artistic and literary practice as well as philosophy, especially speculative philosophy. The "truth" of culture lies precisely in its autonomous, utopian push beyond the *facta bruta* of "the given": this push is its force of resistance. Its "untruth" lies in the social fact that its origins, categories, and conditions of possibility remain thoroughly marked by the division of labor and coercive relations of the status quo: "Artworks," he writes, "are a priori socially culpable" (AT 348/234). Culture promises a happiness that it cannot by itself deliver, and this is no accident: "Neutralization is the social price of aesthetic autonomy" (AT 339/228). And yet if every work is marked by the social outside, art cannot for that be reduced to such marks. Rejecting crude economism, Adorno insists that in its truth content—its moments of autonomy, resistance, and refusal—an artwork exceeds culture's affirmative social functions.

Within this theoretical schema, the place-name Auschwitz—standing synecdochically for a specific historical "event"—plays a crucial role. As a radically qualitative historical development—an "unspeakable" triumph, as

Adorno puts it, of the dialectical motif of quantity passing over into quality (ND 354–5/362)—Auschwitz shakes the ground of traditional metaphysics and effects all the categories and concepts of philosophy and philosophical aesthetics. If bourgeois art's double character (both promise of happiness and social fact) emerged as a specific historical form of the "dialectic of culture and barbarism," then Auschwitz demonstrates that this dialectic has reached "the final stage" (CCS 30/34). For culture's failure to free humanity from barbarism and prevent such catastrophic violence is now irrefragable. In the final stage of this dialectic, culture's "right to exist at all" is in question.

The early formulations of this argument, in "Cultural Criticism and Society" and *Minima Moralia* (MM 66–9/43–5), are given definitive development in the "Meditations on Metaphysics" that end the 1966 *Negative Dialectics*. Culture, Adorno writes there,

> abhors stench because it itself stinks; because its palace, as Brecht put it in a magnificent line, is built of dogshit. Years after that line was written, Auschwitz has irrefutably demonstrated culture's failure. That it could happen in the midst of all the traditions of philosophy, art, and the enlightening sciences says more than merely that these traditions—spirit—were unable to take hold of people and change them. In these lines of business [*Sparten*] themselves, in their emphatic claim to autarky, untruth is squatting [*haust*]. After Auschwitz all culture, and urgent critique along with it, is garbage. In restoring itself after what took place without resistance in its own landscape, culture has become entirely the ideology it was potentially since the time when, opposing material existence, it presumed to inspire that existence with light—the same light refused to existence by the division of spirit from manual labor. Whoever pleads for the preservation of this radically guilty and shabby culture makes himself its accomplice, while whoever refuses culture directly promotes the barbarism that culture revealed itself to be. Not even silence leads out of this circle; silence only rationalizes particular subjective incapacity by granting it the status of objective truth, thereby once more degrading truth into a lie. (ND 359–60/366–7, translation modified)

This passage, immediately following a critique of culture's transfiguration and suppression of the abject, ends in yet another sharp refusal of positivism. The term "silence" (*Schweigen*) is at the point of the rebuttal: "*Nicht einmal Schweigen kommt aus dem Zirkel heraus.*" Adorno here invokes and indicts the celebrated last line of Ludwig Wittgenstein's 1921 *Tractatus:* "*Wovon man nicht sprechen kann, darüber muß man schweigen.*" ("About that of which one cannot speak, one must keep silent.")[2] As usual, Adorno makes the young Wittgenstein stand in for the tendency toward logical positivism and an over-strict principle of verification. A truth that would exclude all that refuses emplotment as tautology and non-contradiction fails before the disaster. For Adorno, silence as such can only be what it means in

Beckett: the completion of the catastrophe, the termination of all thought and movement, the final indifference of "absolute integration." At the same time, the silence and the circle may also be a slap at his other elective philosophical adversary, the Master of the "jargon of authenticity"; we can perhaps hear a sardonic rebuke of Heidegger's notorious postwar silence about his Nazi interlude in Freiburg.[3] However that may be, the difficult claim of the passage is that culture's exposure and ruination does not release it from its constitutive promise to resist barbarism. It cannot put on its old airs, but neither can it withdraw from the scene of its failure. Culture's "after-Auschwitz" aporia—it can't go on, it must go on—is central to the *Aesthetic Theory*: the opening sentence of that work confirms that art's very right to exist remains dubious (AT 1/1).

After what has happened, artists must not simply pick up the traditional forms and conventions and carry on as before—no more than philosophers can now return to their ivory towers and go back to massaging the good old questions in the good old ways. Auschwitz, however, is not itself the catastrophe: the catastrophe is systemic and ongoing. Autonomous, enlightened subjectivity is being systematically liquidated under the reign of exchange value, instrumental reason, and "culture industry"—under the reified structural barbarism Adorno calls "perennial catastrophe" and "perennial suffering" (ND 355/362). The systemic conditions that, in blocking the development of autonomous subjects, made Auschwitz possible, "continue to exist" (WTP 139–40/98–9). Adorno insists on this, and in this sense Auschwitz is merely the "first sample" (ND 355/362), as he puts it, of a catastrophic historical situation that will produce further eruptions of genocidal violence. Indeed, the catastrophe is that the only passage out of "late capitalism" and its absolute integrations is through an enlightened, autonomous subjectivity that, its means of reproduction blocked, appears now to be on the verge of vanishing.

This, then, is the meaning of Adorno's famous prohibition: "After Auschwitz, to go on writing poetry [*Lyrik*] is barbaric."[4] Lyric poetry, a high cultural form par excellence of the bourgeois subject, stands here for all the traditional forms of bourgeois culture, with their assumptions of autonomous subjectivity. Auschwitz has demonstrated that this subjectivity is marked for systemic extermination. Thus to continue to produce art and philosophy in the old forms and according to the old conventions is to be in denial of what happened and goes on happening. In conditions of urgency, which after Auschwitz are continual, denial is merely one more aspect of the catastrophe. To fail to understand this, Adorno writes in aphorism 95 of *Minima Moralia*, is to lack a certain "historical tact": the tactlessness of those who would simply return to "artistic subjectivism" after 1945 "makes the hair stand up" (MM 273/145, translation modified). This is not a tact that merely reflects conventional manners or social hierarchies;

it is rather the effect on the thinking, feeling subject of having grasped the objective catastrophe. It assumes not the internalization of a traditional code of etiquette, but an autonomous and reflected understanding of historical "truth" and "untruth."

How, then, is art to go on, since not to do so is also barbaric? After 1962, Beckett's *Endgame* becomes Adorno's exemplar of an art that successfully negotiates culture's "after-Auschwitz" aporia. But we need at this point to distinguish between Adorno's claims about art in general and those concerned specifically with the representation of catastrophic history. Art, if it is to retain its autonomy, cannot be coerced into trying to represent traumatic history: art need not take up the catastrophe as its theme. But whatever its "idea," art will still have to be different now. Adorno offers some summary reflections on this in the 1967 essay "Is Art Lighthearted?" Art's utopian impulse—its *promesse du bonheur*—was traditionally reflected in an irreducible element of blitheness that indicted antagonistic social reality negatively, by its contrast. (This far, Adorno endorses Marcuse's 1937 essay on the affirmative character of art.) The suffering of the victims of industrial genocide, however, has made lighthearted aesthetic play tactless. In view of this, Adorno qualifies his prohibition: "The statement that after Auschwitz poetry can no longer be written does not hold absolutely, but it is certain that after Auschwitz, because it was possible and remains possible into the unforeseeable future [*ins Unabsehbare*], lighthearted art is no longer conceivable."[5] So long as the conditions of enforced unenlightenment and economic dependence that made Auschwitz possible continue to hold, art must renounce naive or undiluted lightness. Whatever its thematics may be, *if* it is to be playful, *then* it must play seriously, reflecting at the same time on the tactlessness of unreflected playfulness at this point in history. Moreover, linking up with what has already been said, art must reject in its forms any return to exalted subjectivism: no more lyrical expressionism.

The concern of the remainder of this paper is with the special case of art that does attempt to represent traumatic history and its aftermaths. To characterize Adorno's arguments here as an "ethic of representation" is not entirely unproblematic. They could with equal justification be called a "politics of representation." The reason is that Adorno's "truth" notion, in its most profound sense, refuses to split and distribute itself among the compartments of divided knowledge: one truth for aesthetics here; another for political theory there; and another still for science and formal logic way over there. Adorno's negative, dialectical notion of "truth" comprehends all "facts" as unfolding historically, thus as necessarily socially mediated and entangled in ethics and politics. "Truth," in his sense, takes as its ultimate standard that just reconciliation (not to say final resolution) of universal and particular that has never yet been seen but which would, if collectively realized, be the end of

ethics—at least insofar as ethics is thought of as codified prescriptions for behavior among ostensibly free but systematically antagonistic bourgeois individuals. Nevertheless, in "prehistory" we will still speak of ethics.

An ethic of representation is made up of strictures and propositions that would guide, not necessarily in a merely rote or formulaic way, writers, artists, and thinkers in representing what they thematize. It suggests that certain forms and practices are more or less appropriate for certain contents and that the reasons for this are in the end ethico-political. By " 'after-Auschwitz' ethic of representation" I mean Adorno's claims that recent history itself puts conditions on attempts to represent that history in art and literature. Beyond what art in general now must be or not be in the wake of Auschwitz, we are now concerned with the different but related problem of how that "event" and the catastrophe it is a part of ought to be represented.

Adorno's arguments in this regard are formulated in two related 1962 essays, "Commitment" and "Trying to Understand *Endgame*," and are then concisely reprised in *Negative Dialectics*. After Auschwitz, "historical tact" calls for an art that would be an analogue of negative dialectics in philosophy. Tactfully, this art would align itself with the Jewish image ban, with the traditions of negative theology, with that form of the sublime Kant named "negative presentation" (CJ §29 201/135). "Suffering permits no forgetting": it "demands the continued existence of the very art it forbids."[6] But suffering should be represented only negatively—evoked through absence, or through indirect, oblique, or sublime forms of presentation. "In silence alone," writes Adorno, "is the name of the catastrophe to be spoken" (TUE 290/249). (Unlike the evasions of the young Wittgenstein or the old Heidegger, Beckett's silence is a rigorous form of "truthful" speaking.) The suffering of the victims is not to be depicted as such. To do so would be to violate them all over again, by transfiguring their suffering into works of art. All semblance participates in aesthetic pleasure. But for this very reason the form of the work that would remember suffering must be radically austere, radical in its severity. It must resist the possibility, which can never be entirely eliminated in art, that pleasure or positive meaning will be squeezed from its representations. Committed partisanship, for Adorno, says less than autonomous reflection, negative presentation, and formal rigor. In short, and notoriously: Beckett rather than Sartre or Brecht, *Endgame* rather than Schönberg's still too direct *Survivors of Warsaw*.

Adorno's negative ethic, appearing in fragmentary formulations in his literary criticism in 1962, acquired the additional aura of philosophy's remnant authority after the 1966 publication of *Negative Dialectics*, with its powerful critiques of identity and metaphysical optimism. It would be instructive to trace the dissemination of this ethic, in Germany and beyond, in the decades that followed. Certainly by the mid-1980s, this ethic was

well on the way to becoming dominant, if it was not already so, in Germany and perhaps in Europe as a whole. In the visual arts, we could point to certain sculptural installations of Joseph Beuys, Christian Boltanski, and Rachel Whiteread; to the so-called counter-memorials of Jochen Gerz and Esther Shalev-Gerz, Horst Hoheisel, Micha Ullman, and Daniel Libeskind; and even to Claude Lanzmann's 1985 film *Shoa*, which uses negative presentation to remake the documentary form. The virtual explosion of such work in the late 1980s and early 1990s indicates that Adorno's strictures had become conventionalized, given the stamp of institutional approval and support. In the German context, the belated dominance of Adorno's ethic represents a moment of consensual resolution of the postwar conflict between the tasks of mourning and the pull of normalization—a conflict that again flared into public debate after Ronald Reagan and Helmut Kohl's 1985 visit to the Bitburg cemetery and the *Historikerstreit* of 1986.

What is more remarkable is that by the mid-1990s a growing number of international artists seemed to be attacking Adorno's ethic. Roee Rosen, Boaz Arad, Alan Schechner, Piotr Uklanski, Elke Krystufek, and many others have made works that violate, deliberately and even emphatically, Adorno's ban on naming, on positive presentation, on humor and pleasure. This art is expressly tactless, as if to say that to make the hair stand on end is precisely what "historical tact" now demands. While they remain anti-redemptory— in that they refuse to make sense of genocidal history or recuperate it into a positive fable of progress—these new works seem to protest the ossification of Adorno's strictures into rigid formulas for making art about Auschwitz. In the spring of 2002, an exhibition of 13 of these artists at the Jewish Museum in New York erupted into public controversy and met with nearly universal critical condemnation.[7]

Aesthetics, as Adorno insisted, must remain open to history: it must continually rewrite its categories in the light of contemporary artistic practices. The recent challenge to Adorno's ethic of representation indicates the necessity of historicizing the category "after Auschwitz." The controversy surrounding the "Mirroring Evil" exhibition in New York, for example, must be seen in the context of the post–September 11 "war on terror" and the intensification of Sharon's policy of politicide in Gaza and the West Bank. In that context, the hostile reception was unmistakably an attempt to block and silence critical challenges to a Jewish identity grounded in exclusive victimhood. But this identity is precisely what post-Zionist Israeli artists like Rosen and Arad have aimed their art against. And in the artistic response to the political situation in Israel and the occupied Palestinian territories, the limitations of Adorno's ethic are most starkly exposed.

Critical historians—including Norman Finkelstein, Idith Zertal, and Moshe Zimmermann—have documented the Israeli state's strategic

instrumentalization of holocaust memory.[8] As early as the 1961 Eichmann trial and certainly by the June 1967 war, an "official" memory of the Judeocide was being exploited to mobilize public support for state policies and to silence international criticism of Israel. Rosen, Arad, and artists like them are critically intervening into a situation in which the Israeli civic religion is underwriting brutal policies of ethnic cleansing and open assassination—all, now, in the name of memory, security, and the war on terror.

Adorno's subtle dialectic is fully capable of analyzing the possibility that a victim culture could instrumentalize the memory of past genocide to justify present injustice. But for whatever reasons, Adorno seems not to have foreseen this possibility. (And this would be an important difference between his reflections on Auschwitz as a categorical "event" and those developed contemporaneously by Hannah Arendt.) Now that its actualization has been documented, the problems it poses for Adorno's ethic will have to be confronted. In conditioning Adorno's after-Auschwitz ethic, his own notion of "truth"—resolutely oriented beyond the given—is a sufficient guide. In ending, I draw three conclusions:

(1) Adorno's ethic formulated an urgent response to catastrophic history in the context of European postwar reconstruction culture. But as history continues to unfold in a more intensely globalized context, this postwar response cannot be hypostatized or imposed indefinitely. Adorno's qualification—that his ethic holds so long as the conditions that made Auschwitz possible persist—is too rigid and undialectical to the same degree that it is logically rigorous. The reflections on the dialectic in the closing aphorisms of *Minima Moralia* can and should be held against the tendency of his later cultural pessimism to freeze into an ahistoricized standpoint. In an endgame, let's remember, the foreseeable conclusion can still be upset if the advantaged player makes a mistake or by the arrival of an unforeseen "event" that alters the structure and rules of the game. Even if ominous conditions of unenlightenment and unfreedom persist and have tended to worsen, contradictions have now led to new fissures in the capitalist world system. Today, if Immanuel Wallerstein's analysis is correct, no one controls the situation—neither the pampered masters of Davos nor the commanders of the panicked war machines of the system in crisis nor the faceless system itself.[9] No aesthetic strictures developed in the much different context of the post-1945 Pax Americana can be allowed to restrict or hamstring, in advance, culture's critical capacity to respond to this new and unfolding situation.

(2) While general-level critical criteria are indispensable points of reference, the ethics of artistic practice needs to be judged case by case, taking into account, as fully as possible, a work's multiple and shifting contexts of reception. The ways in which works generate political meaning in national

contexts and across borders within the world system need to be analyzed more rigorously than Adorno's method suggests. Closer attention to the immanent dialectic between works and their contexts, to the conditions and situations of exhibition and publication, discloses a level of cultural politics that Adorno undervalued.

For example, the fall 2003 issue of *Art Journal*, a publication of the College Art Association in New York, contains nine pages of color photography documenting Shimon Attie's *Writing on the Wall* series, realized in Berlin in 1992 and 1993.[10] Attie's eloquent projections of archival photographs onto buildings in an old Jewish neighborhood of East Berlin made sense in 1992, shortly after the fall of the Wall made these areas more accessible. But today we would have to ask, why now, ten years later? Why this journal? After all, Attie's project, having enjoyed a glowing international reception at the time of its realization, is hardly unknown today. And yet here it is again, reproduced without the slightest trace of critical contextualization or new interpretive work.

In the dialectic of mourning, of enlightenment as mourning, critical pressure must continually be directed to the points of greatest resistance. These are always shifting and always reflect configurations of differential power and contexts of domination. In the current context of global crisis, any invocation of Auschwitz—as opposed to the larger catastrophe Adorno evoked by that term—risks being enlisted, wittingly and willingly or not, as moral cover for the brutal policies of Sharon's Likud-led government enemy and, by extension and alliance, for the disastrous neo-imperial adventures of the Washington militarists.

(3) The imperative to respect the suffering of the victims and their memory is a grave one. This imperative cannot, however, have priority over the imperative to expose and oppose suffering being inflicted in the here and now. The urgent need for artistic practices to resist currently unfolding injustice through autonomous cultural interventions must come before valid injunctions to respect the memory of the dead—especially and most clearly when that memory is being officially exploited as a moral alibi for brutal policies of state. This is not to deny the claims of spectrality. But it is to insist that the dead should not dominate the living or block any possible straight gate to the future. As Benjamin lucidly argued, our debts to the dead—to the victims and vanquished of history—are best honored in active struggle: "Not even the dead will be safe from the enemy, *if that enemy wins*" (CH 253/391, my italics).[11]

In sum, the negative way of Adorno's aesthetic is *one* way to represent traumatic history, but is *only* one way. It may, for a few decades, have been *the* way. That it still is, or should be, can no longer be taken for granted.

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Notes

Introduction: The Hit

1. Jacques Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, Jacques-Alain Miller, ed., Alan Sheridan, trans. (New York: Norton, 1981), pp. 53–63.

2. Carl Schmitt, *The Concept of the Political*, George Schwab, trans. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), p. 26: "The specific political distinction to which political actions and motives can be reduced is that between friend and enemy." The binary opposition to which the Nazi legal theorist sought to reduce politics as early as 1927 was certainly internalized by both the United States and the Soviet Union during the so-called Cold War. This mirroring between capitalism's self-appointed defender of last resort and its alleged enemy unto death is of course entangled, through the battleground of Afghanistan, with the specific background to the attacks of 9/11. Indeed the *Realpolitik* captured in the formula "whoever is the enemy of my enemy is my friend" is itself the ethical and political lapse that the ruling American pragmatists have never yet understood. The unintended consequences that the CIA calls "blowback" are not, categorically, unforeseeable. As for Schmitt's notion of sovereignty as the (state's) power to declare the "state of emergency" and name the enemy, Walter Benjamin's 1940 critique remains unsurpassed: "The tradition of the oppressed teaches us that the 'state of emergency' in which we live is [not the exception but] the rule" (CH 254/392). The emergency is only one from the perspective and interests of the ruling order; for the ones who are dominated and exploited, it is always an emergency. To be sure, it is not to be denied that there are political friends and enemies—even after all the critico-deconstructive equivocations have been registered. But who gets to name them, under what conditions and with what consequences—as well as the problem of how each is to be treated under international law, especially in conflicts in which the legality of a particular state or world system is ultimately at stake—are, contra Schmitt, all political questions as well. Incisive here is Jacques Derrida's reading of Schmitt in *Politics of Friendship*, George Collins, trans. (London: Verso, 1997). These stakes are obviously in play in the so-called war on terror—from Guantánamo and Bagram to Abu Ghraib and who knows how many other secret prison and interrogation centers the world over.

3. Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000). Throughout these essays, I am responding to a first reading of this book, in particular to Hardt and Negri's notion of a de-territorialized "Empire," to their attempt to rethink the Marxist revolutionary subject as

"the multitude," and to their Deleuzian interpretation of globalization as the advent of global "immanence."

4. Here and throughout, I cite George W. Bush's more abbreviated and symptomatic formulation rather than the edited and more semantically and grammatically viable "war against terrorism." While the latter depends on a self-serving definition of terrorism, the phrase at least signifies a coherent politico-military aim. Bush's phrase "war on terror" more revealingly conveys the impossible fantasy being manipulated in the official response to the attacks of September 11: the fantasy of a level of security that would banish fear itself. Such a fantasy cannot even be articulated without rigidly denying the global inequities, economic violence, and destructive Cold War gamesmanship that formed the context for the 2001 attacks. George W. Bush, in his January 29, 2002 State of the Union Address, in *Vital Speeches of the Day*, vol. 68, no. 9 (2002): 259: "Our war on terror is well begun, but is only begun."

5. Jean-Paul Sartre, "Preface" to Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, Constance Farrington, trans. (New York: Grove Weidenfeld, 1963), p. 14.

6. Walter Benjamin, "Das Kunstwerk im Zeitalter seiner technischen Reproduzierbarkeit," in Siegfried Unseld, ed., *Illuminationen: Ausgewählte Schriften*, vol. 1 (Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1977), pp. 143–7; in English as "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," in Hannah Arendt, ed., Harry Zohn, trans. *Illuminations* (New York: Schocken, 1968), pp. 223–5.

7. Benjamin, "Über einige Motive bei Baudelaire," in *Illuminationen*, pp. 187–95 and 221–9; "On Some Motives in Baudelaire," in *Illuminations*, pp. 157–65 and 186–94.

8. Lacan, *Four Fundamental Concepts*, p. 53.

9. Although I write "the sublime," using the definite article to refer to the category from the history of European aesthetics, it is more strictly correct to insist, as Thomas Pepper does, that there is no one sublime, if there ever was, rather than a multiplicity of effects and traditions gathered or forced together under this name. See Thomas Adam Pepper, *Singularities: Extremes of Theory in the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p. 213.

10. Herbert Marcuse, "Über den affirmativen Charakter der Kultur" [1937], in *Schriften*, vol. 3 (Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1979); in English as "The Affirmative Character of Culture," in Jeremy J. Shapiro, trans., *Negations: Essays in Critical Theory* (Boston: Beacon, 1968).

11. In its anxious condemnation of any sign of the "irrational," this tendency seems clearly to be a survival and dissemination of early Frankfurt School responses to mass-cultural orchestrations under fascist regimes. Among contemporary Marxist critics whose writings exhibit a consistent hostility to the sublime, Benjamin H. D. Buchloh would be exemplary. See Buchloh's use of the term "sublime" within the hard, undialectical opposition he sets up between "ostentatious mourning" and "factual accuracy" in the essay "Hans Haacke: Memory and Instrumental Reason," in Buchloh, ed., *Neo-Avantgarde and Culture Industry: Essays on European and American Art from 1955 to 1976* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2000), pp. 205–06.

12. Jean-François Lyotard, *Peregrinations: Law, Form, Event* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), p. 41.

13. Three of the most important recent attempts to rethink the knots of transformational agency are Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics* (London: Verso, 1985); Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning, and the New International*, Peggy Kamuf, trans. (London: Routledge, 1994); and Hardt and Negri, *Empire*. On the global field of practice in which the new models are emerging and being tested, see the continuing series of essays and interviews, "A Movement of Movements?" inaugurated in *New Left Review* 9 (May/June 2001); and William F. Fisher and Thomas Ponniah, eds., *Another World Is Possible: Popular Alternatives to Globalization at the World Social Forum* (Nova Scotia: Fernwood; Selangor: Sird; Capetown: David Philip; and London and New York: Zed, 2003).

14. In *Negative Dialectics*, Adorno's critique of truth as correspondence is formulated as a defense of "a truth concept other than that of *adaequatio*" (ND 357/ 364). See also Adorno's elaborations of "the emphatic notion of truth" in the 1962 radio talk and essay "Wozu noch Philosophie?" in *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 10.2, ed., Rolf Tiedemann (Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1975); in English as "Why Still Philosophy," in Henry W. Pickford, trans., *Critical Models: Interventions and Catchwords* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998). The qualified defense of speculative culture and the critique of the correspondence theory of truth are often formulated as an attack on the young Ludwig Wittgenstein of the 1921 *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, whom Adorno typically has stand in for a "positivism" that restricts itself to "the given." As Pickford observes in a sharp translator's note (p. 317), Adorno typically condenses and recites his arguments by obliquely invoking (or parodistically mangling) the famous opening line of Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*: "Die Welt ist alles, was der Fall ist" ("The world is everything that is the case.").

15. Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialektik der Aufklärung: Philosophische Fragmente* (Frankfurt/Main: Fischer Verlag, 1969), p. ix; in English as *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, John Cumming, trans. (New York: Continuum, 1998), p. xi, translation modified.

16. This far, I am in agreement and sympathy with Alain Badiou's critique of the political tendency of the so-called ethical turn, especially in the French context, as well as with his stimulating attempt to rescue the figure of the militant. See Badiou, *Ethics: An Essay on the Understanding of Evil*, Peter Hallward, trans. (London: Verso, 2001). I would like to thank Steven Corcoran for many stimulating discussions of Badiou on demos and at the dinner table in Berlin.

17. The most obvious and important of such differences is that Heidegger's opening to the *Ereignis* of the "truth of Being" involves a deliberate suspension of critical faculties—the allegedly de-objectifying posture Heidegger called *Inständigkeit* ("standing-within") and the related comportment of *Gelassenheit* (composed "letting-be" or "releasement toward objects")—that Adorno refused to abide. See e.g., Heidegger's discussion of *Inständigkeit* as a "preserving" practice of reception in the 1935/36 *Der Ursprung des Kunstwerkes* (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1960), pp. 67–8; in English as "The Origin of the Work of Art," in Albert Hofstadter, trans., *Poetry, Language, Thought* (New York: Harper & Row, 1971), pp. 66–7. Cf. Adorno's rejection of an aesthetics reduced to a phenomenology "from below" (AT 510/343) and his notion, clearly formulated as

a reply to Heidegger, of "standing-firm" (*Standhalten*) as the happiness of not selling out to "accumulated, speechless pain" (AT 13/15 and 65–6/39–40).

18. Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, pp. 166–76. Alain Badiou's apparently more action- and praxis-oriented and purportedly non-dialectical re-inflection of this term must also be cited at this point. Though I cannot discuss Badiou's condensation of Althusser, Lacan, and Sartre here, I note that his systematic formulation of the event as what breaks with the law or "state" of a situation—thereby consti- tuting a militant subject and initiating a "truth process" and its historical "sequence"—would have to be included in any comprehensively comparative engagement with the geneology and politics of this term. See Badiou, *Ethics*.

19. See Adorno's correspondence with Herbert Marcuse on the German student movement, introduced by Esther Leslie, in *New Left Review* 233 (January/ February 1999), pp. 118–36; and Rolf Wiggershaus, *The Frankfurt School: Its History, Theories and Political Significance*, Michael Robertson, trans. (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1995), pp. 609–36.

20. Adorno, "Resignation," in Henry W. Pickford, trans., *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 10.2; in English as "Resignation," in Henry W. Pickford, trans., *Critical Models* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998).

21. Pepper, *Singularities*, p. 23: "Reading [*Minima Moralia*] must be an experience that never spares the reader the constant need to examine his or her specific differences. Identification as a readerly strategy belongs to the New Old Right, which is why we don't have to throw out Adorno because he rejects, for exam- ple, Jazz: it is only the uncritical desire to seek a Master, thus to be a Slave, that would demand of a great thinker that his taste always be correct." It would be remiss to fail to also acknowledge, at this point, the compelling critical assessments of Fredric Jameson's *Late Capitalism: Adorno, or, the Persistence of the Dialectic* (London: Verso, 1990), especially Jameson's retrospective remarks in his introduction, "Adorno in the Stream of Time," pp. 1–12.

22. Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialektik der Aufklärung*, p. ix; *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, p. xi, translation modified.

23. See e.g., Derrida, "L'Animal que donc je suis," in Marie-Louise Mallet, ed., *L'Animal autobiographique: autour du travail de Jacques Derrida* (Paris: Galilée, 1999), behind which loom the 1968 essay "The Ends of Man," in Derrida, *Margins of Philosophy*, Alan Bass, trans. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), and Derrida, *Of Spirit: Heidegger and the Question*, Geoffrey Bennington and Rachel Bowlby, trans. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), pp. 47–57.

24. Derrida, "The future of the profession or the university without condition (thanks to the 'Humanities,' what *could take place* tomorrow)," in Tom Cohen, ed., *Jacques Derrida and the Humanities: A Critical Reader* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), p. 29.

25. Benjamin, "Linke Melancholie," in Rolf Tiedemann and Hermann Schweppenhäuser, eds., *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 3 (Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1972); in English as "Left-Wing Melancholy," Michael W. Jennings, Howard Eiland, and Gary Smith, eds., in Ben Brewster, trans., *Selected Writings*, vol. 2 (Cambridge, MA: Belknap/Harvard University Press, 1999).

26. See Immanuel Wallerstein, "The Eagle Has Crash Landed," *Foreign Policy* (July/August 2002), pp. 60–8; "Revolts Against the System," *New Left Review* 18)

(November/December 2002), pp. 29–39; and "Entering Global Anarchy," *New Left Review* 22 (July/August 2003), pp. 27–35.

27. Fanon, *Wretched of the Earth*, pp. 105–06.

Chapter One   Reading the Lisbon Earthquake: Adorno, Lyotard, and the Contemporary Sublime

1. On this debate, see Dominick LaCapra, *Representing the Holocaust: History, Theory, Trauma* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994), pp. 43–110; Enzo Traverso, *Understanding the Nazi Genocide: Marxism after Auschwitz*, Peter Drucker, trans. (London: Pluto Press, 1999), pp. 63–78; and Saul Friedlander, ed., *Probing the Limits of Representation: Nazism and the "Final Solution"* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992), pp. 1–21.

2. Norman G. Finkelstein, *The Holocaust Industry: Reflections on the Exploitation of Jewish Suffering* (London: Verso, 2000). For Finkelstein's account of his book's comparative international reception, see his foreword to the 2001 edition.

3. For a survey of the historical literature, see J. Samuel Walker, "The Decision to Use the Bomb: A Historiographical Update," in Michael J. Hogan, ed., *Hiroshima in History and Memory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 11–37.

4. Robert Jay Lifton and Greg Mitchell, *Hiroshima in America: A Half-Century of Denial* (New York: Avon, 1995); See also Richard Minear, "Atomic Holocaust, Nazi Holocaust: Some Reflections," in *Diplomatic History* 19 (Spring 1996), pp. 347–65.

5. On the *Enola Gay* controversy, see the essays in Edward T. Linenthal and Tom Engelhardt, eds., *History Wars: The Enola Gay and Other Battles for the American Past* (New York: Henry Holt, 1996); and in Kai Bird and Lawrence Lifschultz, eds., *Hiroshima's Shadow: Writings on the Denial of History and the Smithsonian Controversy* (Sony Creek, CT: Pamphleteer's Press, 1998).

6. There were of course isolated exceptions that proved the rule: e.g., Robert Morris's installation *Jornada del Muerto*, part of the 1981/2 exhibition "Metaphor: New Projects by Contemporary Sculptors" at the Hirschhorn Museum in Washington, DC. A comprehensive and theoretically informed account of the avoidances of and confrontations with Hiroshima and its legacies within postwar and post-1968 American art and cultural production is badly needed. In its stead, we have a beginning of sorts in Peter Schwenger's deconstruction-inspired study of the "nuclear sublime" in theory and literature in *Letter Bomb: Nuclear Holocaust and the Exploding Word* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992).

7. "One cannot dismiss the thought that the invention of the atomic bomb, which can obliterate hundreds of thousands of people literally in one blow, belongs in the same historical context as genocide." Theodor W. Adorno, "Erziehung nach Auschwitz," in *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 10.2, Rolf Tiedemann, ed. (Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1975), p. 675; in English as "Education after Auschwitz," in Henry W. Pickford, trans., *Critical Models: Interventions and Catchwords* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), p. 192. Hiroshima is a latent topos that erupts repeatedly in Adorno's postwar oeuvre,

for example in aphorisms 33 and 68 of MM and throughout the great 1962 essay on Samuel Beckett, TUE.

8. The passages are: AT 292–6/196–9 and 363–5/243–6.

9. Lyotard's theoretical work on the sublime was disseminated broadly through timely translation into English and German. Among the most widely read and taught texts in English are the essays "The Sublime and the Avant-Garde" (1984), "Newman: The Instant" (1984), and "After the Sublime, the State of Aesthetics" (1987), all in TI. The latter also includes "Representation, Presentation, Unrepresentable," a revised version of Lyotard's first essay on the sublime, published as "Presenting the Unpresentable: The Sublime," in Lisa Liebmann, trans., *Artforum* (April 1982). Lyotard's further elaborations of the category include: "The Interest of the Sublime," in Jeffrey Librett, trans., *Of the Sublime: Presence in Question* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993); *Peregrinations: Law, Form, Event* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988); *Heidegger and "the jews,"* Andreas Michel and Mark Roberts, trans. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1990); and *Lessons on the Analytic of the Sublime: Kant's Critique of Judgment*, E. Rottenberg, trans. (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994).

The continuing influence of Lyotard's sublime is manifest in such publications and exhibition catalogs as Paul Crowther, ed., *The Contemporary Sublime*: *Sensibilities of Transcendence and Shock* (*Art & Design* Profile 40) (London: Academy Group Ltd., 1995); Bo Nilsson, ed., *Om det Sublima/On the Sublime* (Malmö: Rooseum Center for Contemporary Art, 1999); and Tracey Bashkoff, ed., *On the Sublime* (New York: Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation, 2001).

10. Kant, CJ §29 201/135:

> We need not worry that the feeling of the sublime will lose [something] if it is exhibited in such an abstract way as this, which is wholly negative as regards the sensible. For though the imagination finds nothing beyond the sensible that could support it, this very removal of its barriers also makes it feel unbounded, so that its separation [from the sensible] is an exhibition [*Darstellung*] of the infinite; and though an exhibition of the infinite can never be more than merely negative [*bloß negative Darstellung*], it still expands the soul. Perhaps the most sublime passage in the Jewish Law is the commandment: Thou shat not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven or on earth, or under the earth, etc.

11. See TI 85 and 90–3.

12. Adorno's attacks on Heidegger are relentless and are launched from texts across the postwar oeuvre. The cited phrases are from "Wozu noch Philosophie?" in *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 10.2, pp. 465–6; "Why Still Philosophy?" in *Critical Models*, p. 11.

13. Terry Eagleton, *The Ideology of the Aesthetic* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1990), hereafter cited by page number in the text.

14. Herbert Marcuse, "Über den affirmativen Charakter der Kultur" [1937], in *Schriften*, vol. 3 (Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1979); in English as "The Affirmative Character of Culture," in Jeremy J. Shapiro, trans., *Negations: Essays in Critical Theory* (Boston: Beacon, 1968).

15. Quoted in Marjorie Hope Nicolson, *Mountain Gloom and Mountain Glory: The Development of the Aesthetics of the Infinite* [1959] (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1997), p. 277.

16. Pierre Bourdieau, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste* [1979], Richard Nice, trans. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1984).

17. Kant, CJ §29 190/124–5:

> It is a fact that what is called sublime by us, having been prepared through culture, comes across as merely repellent to a person who is uncultured and lacking in the development of moral ideas. In all the evidence of nature's destructive force, and in the large scale of its might, in contrast to which his own is nonexistent, he will see only the hardship, danger and misery that would confront anyone forced to live in such a place. Thus (as M. de Saussure relates) the good and otherwise sensible Savoyard peasant did not hesitate to call anyone a fool who fancies glaciered mountains. [Here Kant references Horace Bénédict de Saussure, whose 1779 *Voyages dans les Alpes* represents a first professionalization of the passion pioneered by the English dilettantes. In the very next line, Kant denigrates the latter as "travelers."—G.R.] He might even have had a point, if Saussure had acted merely from fancy, as most travelers tend to do, in exposing himself to the dangers involved in his observations, or in order that he might some day be able to describe them with pathos." Of course, to be fair to the manifest content of the passage, the requisite "culture" Kant has in mind is an adequate admiration and respect for the supersensible power of reason that is, for him, part of the a priori endowment of human nature. As he will put it later in the same section, he is doing philosophy, not "empirical anthropology. (CJ §29 205/139)

18. The text of Benjamin's talk, broadcast by the Berliner Rundfunk, is in Rolf Tiedemann and Hermann Schweppenhäuser, eds., *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 7 (Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1974), pp. 220–6; in English as "The Lisbon Earthquake," in Michael W. Jennings, Howard Eiland, and Gary Smith, eds., Rodney Livingstone, trans., *Selected Writings*, vol. 2 (Cambridge, MA: Belknap/Harvard University Press, 1999), pp. 536–40.

19. Theodore Besterman, *Voltaire* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1976), p. 365.

20. In a preface to his poem, Voltaire tactfully maintains that his intention is not to attack Pope and *tout est bien*, but only to "raise his voice against the improper use" of such a doctrine:

> If, when Lisbon, Mesquinez, Tetuan, and so many other towns were swallowed up in the month of November 1755, philosophers had called out to the miserable individuals who barely managed to pull themselves out of the ruins, "*Tout est bien*. The heirs of the dead will get rich; the construction workers will make money rebuilding houses; animals will fatten themselves on the bodies buried under the rubble. This is the necessary consequence of inevitable causes; your personal ill fortune is of no account, for you contribute to the overall well-being," such a speech would certainly have been as cruel as the earthquake was destructive. Voltaire, *Candide and Related*

Texts, David Wooton, trans. (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2000), p. 98. The latter also includes relevant excerpts from Leibniz, Pope, and Rousseau.

21. While an inflection of Hegel's notion of "second nature" from the *Philosophy of Right* is arguably implicit in the young Marx's materialist reconception of "alienation," Georg Lukács fully developed the notion in his own 1922 Hegelian reading of *Capital*, giving it the formulations that would exert a strong pull on Walter Benjamin and the prewar Frankfurt School. See Lukács, "Reification and the Consciousness of the Proletariat," the central essay of his *History and Class Consciousness*, Rodney Livingstone, trans. (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1971), pp. 32–222.

22. Adorno's clearest statement of this argument is in WTP 139–40/98–9. His use of the term "immaturity" (*Unmündigkeit*) alludes to Kant's 1784 essay "An Answer to the Question: 'What Is Enlightenment?' " There, Kant famously defines *Aufklärung* as "man's emergence from self-incurred immaturity." Kant, *Political Writings*, Hans Reiss, ed., H. B. Nisbet, trans. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p. 54. Note however that Adorno's reading of Kantian enlightenment is dialectical. The "truth" of enlightened subjectivity, assumed in WTP, is succinctly formulated in "The Schema of Mass Culture": the autonomous, enlightened subject "still represent[s] the ultimate limit of reification." See Adorno, *The Culture Industry: Selected Essays on Mass Culture*, J. M. Bernstein, ed. (London: Routledge, 2001), p. 93. But this acknowledgment of the "truth" of enlightenment would have to be read together with the critique of Kant's essay in Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialektik der Aufklärung: Philosophische Fragmente* (Frankfurt/Main: Fischer Verlag, 1969), pp. 88–93; in English as *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, John Cumming, trans. (New York: Continuum, 1998), pp. 81–6.

23. As Robert Hullot-Kentor's translation does faithfully reflect, an operative distinction in this passage is that between *Erlebnis*, or experience degraded into discrete moments of "lived time," and *Erfahrung*, that experience which, through reflection, would correspond to enlightened, autonomous subjectivity. As autonomous subjectivity is increasingly blocked at the structural or systemic level, *Erlebnis* becomes the usual or conventional form of "experience," rendering those rare moments of *Erfahrung* even more emphatic.

24. Lyotard, *The Differend: Phrases in Dispute* [1983], Georges Van Den Abbeele, trans. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988), p. 56. See also his 1980 lecture "Discussions, or Phrasing 'after Auschwitz'," which registers one stage in Lyotard's confrontation with Adorno's *Negative Dialectics*, as well as underscores the role of Auschwitz as an ethical impetus shared by critical theory and so-called poststructuralism: in English in Andrew Benjamin, ed., *The Lyotard Reader* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1989), pp. 361–92.

Chapter Two   Joseph Beuys and the "After-Auschwitz" Sublime

1. Joseph Beuys, "Reden über das eigene Land," in Hans Mayer et al., eds., *Reden über das eigene Land: Deutschland 3* (Munich: Bertelsmann Verlag, 1985) and reissued as Beuys, *Sprechen über Deutschland* (Wangen/Allgäu: FIU-Verlag,

1995), pp. 10–11: "Daß dieses auch der einzige Weg sei, um alle noch im Rassistischen treibende Umtriebe, schrecklichen Sünden, nicht zu beschreibenden schwarzen Male zu überwinden, ohne sie auch nur einen Augenblick aus dem Blickfeld zu verlieren, ließ mich entscheiden für die Kunst." In this context, *schwarze Male* carries the additional possible meaning "black/dark/dirty times." And there is a subtle but important difference between *unbeschreiblich* ("indescribable/enormous/staggering") and Beuys's *nicht zu beschreibenden* (literally, "not for describing/not to be described"). Taking into account the semantic possibilities which the German holds open, Beuys seems to imply, or acknowledge, that these "black marks," related to "still racially-driven machinations" and "terrible sins," are not to be talked about among Germans, or at least can only be referenced indirectly. Hence, as strong as the wording is, neither the Jews nor Auschwitz is named. And yet it is clear that this *überwinden* ("overcoming") that doesn't lose sight of its object belongs to the *Aufgabe* ("task") of the German people. Cf. Timothy Nevill's English trans., in Joseph Beuys, "Talking about One's Own Country: Germany," in Wilfried Wiegand et al., eds., *In Memoriam Joseph Beuys: Obituaries, Essays, Speeches* (Bonn: Inter Nationes, 1986), p. 37.

2. Beuys, *Sprechen über Deutschland*, p. 13; "Talking about One's Own Country: Germany," p. 38.

3. What is called "life" here would be the sum of Beuys's public postures and utterances, including self-interpretations and his own account of his intentions. In general, both admirers and denigrators have accepted or rejected Beuys's life and art together as a single, unproblematized unity, in an all-or-nothing approach. The number of critics who have acknowledged a disjunction, or the possibility of one, between the works and Beuys's words about them remains small. I count Edit de Ak and Walter Robinson, "Beuys: Art Encagé," *Art in America* (November/December 1974), p. 78; Kim Levin, "Joseph Beuys: The New Order," *Arts Magazine* (April 1980) and reprinted in Levin, *Beyond Modernism: Essays on Art from the 70s and 80s* (New York: Harper & Row, 1988), p. 176; Thierry de Duve, "Joseph Beuys, or The Last of the Proletarians," *October* 45 (Summer 1988), pp. 58–9; and Armin Zweite, *Joseph Beuys: Natur Materie Form* (Düsseldorf: Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen; Munich: Schirmer/Mosel, 1992), pp. 37–9.

In so far as the objects bear words and the actions include speech, one cannot always distinguish clearly between Beuys's art and his discourse. The distinction is nevertheless a crucial one. At the very least, any artist's self-interpretations must be tested against the works themselves. Ultimately at stake here are issues of intentionality and the generation of meaning which are, within a general shift in intellectual focus from production to reception, still contested.

4. Numerous published statements and interviews evince Beuys's usual reluctance to speak of Auschwitz and his tendency to deflect direct questions about it into discussions of the present or future. See for example the interview in Caroline Tisdall, *Joseph Beuys* (New York: Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, 1979), pp. 21–3. The few important exceptions are discussed at the end of the essay.

5. Beuys, *Sprechen über Deutschland*, p. 10. Alain Borer concludes from this that the Jews represent a "dimension spirituelle absente" in Beuys's thinking: Borer, "Déploration de Joseph Beuys," in Fabrice Hergott and Marion Hohlfeldt, eds.,

Joseph Beuys (Paris: Éditions du Centre Pompidou, 1994), p. 29; in English as "A Lament for Joseph Beuys," in Lothar Schirmer, ed., *The Essential Joseph Beuys* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1997), p. 29.

6. Levin, *Beyond Modernism*, p. 176.

7. Levin, "Introduction," in Carin Kuoni, ed., *Energy Plan for the Western Man: Joseph Beuys in America* (New York: Four Walls Eight Windows, 1990), p. 2.

8. Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, "Beuys: The Twilight of the Idol, Preliminary Notes for a Critique," *Artforum* (January 1980) and reprinted in Buchloh, *Neo-Avantgarde and Culture Industry: Essays on European and American Art from 1955 to 1975* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2000). On the influence of this text in America, see Christopher Phillips, "Back to Beuys," *Art in America* (September 1993), p. 90; and David Levi Strauss, "American Beuys: 'I Like America and America Likes Me'," *Parkett* 26 (December 1990), p. 124. Buchloh's essay also looms large behind the structure of the Tate Gallery, Liverpool's 1994 critical forum on Beuys. See David Thistlewood, ed., *Joseph Beuys: Diverging Critiques* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press and Tate Gallery Liverpool, 1995).

9. Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, Rosalind Krauss, and Annette Michelson, "Joseph Beuys at the Guggenheim," *October* 12 (Spring 1980), p. 17.

10. Interpretations attempting to put Beuys "on the couch," in order to argue that his art enacts a personal catharsis of the war years have only tended to confuse matters by reinforcing the focus on the artist's account of his private history. See e.g., Donald Kuspit, "Joseph Beuys: The Body of the Artist," *Artforum* (Summer 1991) and reprinted in Thistlewood, ed., *Joseph Beuys*: *Diverging Critiques*, pp. 95–105.

11. For the generally accepted chronology, see Götz Adriani, Winifried Konnertz, and Karin Thomas, *Joseph Beuys* (Cologne: Dumont, 1994). The challenge to Beuys's account of the war years begins with Buchloh's 1980 *Artforum* essay, already cited. For a recent version of that challenge, see Frank Gieseke and Albert Markert, *Flieger, Filz, und Vaterland: Eine Erweiterte Beuys Biographie* (Berlin: Elefanten Press, 1996).

12. See Tisdall, *Joseph Beuys*, p. 21.

13. *Monument for Auschwitz* (1958) and *Design for Auschwitz* (1957), in Franz Joseph van der Grinten, "Beuys Beitrag zum Wettbewerb für das Auschwitzmonument," in Inge Lorenz, ed., *Joseph Beuys Symposium Kranenburg 1995* (Basel: Museum Schloß Moyland and Weise Verlag, 1995), pp. 199–203. The first had been published previously as fig. 71 in Franz Joseph and Hans van der Grinten, *Joseph Beuys: Wasserfarben/Watercolours*, 1936–1963 (Frankfurt/Main, 1975), pp. 48–9; and as fig. 31 in Tisdall, *Joseph Beuys*, p. 22.

14. Figures 279a–f, 280, 281, and 282 in Eckhart Gillen, ed., *Deutschlandbilder: Kunst aus einem geteilten Land* (Cologne: Dumont, 1997), pp. 272–3.

15. In the Hessisches Landesmuseum, Darmstadt: *Auschwitz* (1957), an overdrawn brochure fragment, now in *Auschwitz Demonstration* (Vitrine 4, Room 5); *Transformation Sign* (1957), a pine construction now in Vitrine 1, Room 5; and Title Unknown, a smaller nutwood construction, now part of the cabinet assemblage *Scene from the Stag Hunt 1961* in Room 2. See Eva Beuys, Wenzel Beuys, and Jessyka Beuys, eds., *Joseph Beuys Block Beuys* (Munich: Schirmer/Mosel, 1990), pp. 182–5, 158–61, and 40–73, respectively. A third

model, of pewter and zinc, *Untitled* (*Table with Crystal*), is in a private collection but is reproduced as fig. 18 in *Transit Joseph Beuys: Plastische Arbeiten 1947–1985* (Krefeld: Kaiser Wilhelm Museum, 1991), p. 54.

16. Mario Kramer, "Art Nourishes Life—Joseph Beuys: *Auschwitz Demonstration, 1956–1964*," in *Deutschlandbilder*, pp. 261–71. The debt my discussion owes to Kramer's careful essay, originally a lecture given at the 1995 Beuys Symposium at The New School in New York, will be obvious. His essay should be read in parallel with my abbreviated account here. As will be seen, however, I part from Kramer's conclusions that Beuys's position with respect to the Nazi period is "very clear and unambiguous" (p. 270) and that Beuys's early work can unproblematically be read as "a type of catharsis" (p. 261).

17. The winning design—a stark, pierced granite ramp by a team of Polish sculptors and architects led by Oskar and Zofia Hansen—was not accepted by the Committee and was never built. A compromise monument was dedicated in 1967. Robert Jan van Pelt and Debórah Dwork, *Auschwitz, 1270 to the Present* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996), pp. 375–8; and Jochen Spielmann, "Auschwitz is Debated in Oswiecim: The Topography of Remembrance," in James E. Young, ed., *The Art of Memory: Holocaust Memorials in History* (Munich: Prestel; New York: Jewish Museum, 1994), pp. 169–73.

18. "Wahrzeichen," in the written text accompanying Beuys's proposal, quoted by Van der Grinten, in Lorenz, ed., *Joseph Beuys Symposium Kranenburg 1995*, p. 200.

19. Kramer, in Gillen, ed., *Deutschlandbilder*, p. 261.

20. For the corresponding titles and dates, see ibid., or Eva Beuys et al., eds., *Joseph Beuys Block Beuys*, pp. 182–7.

21. Max Reithmann, "In the Rubblefield of German History: Questions to Joseph Beuys," in Gene Ray, ed., *Joseph Beuys: Mapping the Legacy* (New York: Distributed Art Publishers; Sarasota, FL: Ringling Museum of Art, 2001), pp. 164–8.

22. Plate 40 in Ann Temkin and Bernice Rose, *Thinking Is Form: The Drawings of Joseph Beuys* (Philadelphia: Philadelphia Museum of Art; New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1993), p. 150; pl. 48 in Schirmer, ed., *Essential Joseph Beuys*; and pl. 59/cat. 151 in Zweite, *Joseph Beuys: Natur Materie Form.*

23. In the Staatliche Museen, Kassel, and pls. 72 and 73 in Schirmer, ed., *Essential Joseph Beuys.* In general usage, which Beuys has followed, as well as in wartime SS documents, *Konzentrationslager* (abbreviated *KZ*) is a blanket term encompassing what historians have come to distinguish as two different kinds of camps: prison and forced labor camps, *Konzentrationslager* in the strict sense; and killing centers, or *Vernichtungslager*—literally "extermination camps." I leave this title in German because *Essen* (or *essen*) does not force a choice between its three possibilities: "food," "meal," and, more actively, "eating." Thus the openness of Beuys's title gestures both to the prisoner's emphatic task of surviving the ordeal and to the systematic "consumption" of the victim-prisoner as an industrial "raw material" (or fungible unit of abstracted labor).

24. The long title of Beuys's action, indicating its planned component sequences, is *Kukei, akopee-Nein!, Brown Cross, Fat Corners, Model Fat Corners.* The clearest account of the Aachen event is now Adam Oeller's "Fluxus at the Border: Aachen, July 20, 1964," in Gillen, ed., *Deutschlandbilder*, pp. 200–07. The

standard account of Beuys's contribution remains Uwe M. Schneede, *Joseph Beuys: Die Aktionen* (Stuttgart: Gerd Hatje, 1994), pp. 42–56.

25. The event was not originally conceived to take place on the anniversary of July 20, but early on, the historical significance of that date was seized upon by student organizers. The eleven participating artists were informed well ahead of time, and several of them "consciously integrated aspects relatable to July 20 in their works." Oeller, in *Deutschlandbilder*, p. 200. Cf. Schneede, *Joseph Beuys: Die Aktionen*, p. 42.

26. Adriani, *Joseph Beuys*, p. 62. Cf. Oeller, in *Deutschlandbilder*, p. 203: "Beuys took a packet of Rama margarine from one of his boxes of materials and dropped it into the partially filled, already warmed box of fat." See also Schneede, *Joseph Beuys: Die Aktionen*, p. 47, where the miming of heat rather than the actual melting is emphasized; and Heiner Stachelhaus, who in his *Joseph Beuys* (Düsseldorf: ECON, 1991), pp. 165–6, has Beuys melt the fat while Brock recites the text of Goebbel's speech.

27. Peter Nisbet, "Crash Course: Remarks on a Beuys Story," in Ray, ed., *Joseph Beuys: Mapping the Legacy*, p. 7.

28. I cannot agree at all with Caroline Tisdall that the juxtaposition of fat with the burner in *Auschwitz Demonstration* is "ambiguous." (Tisdall, *Joseph Beuys*, p. 21.) Andrzej Strzelecki tells us more than we would wish to know about fat and the Auschwitz crematoria: "The fat that dripped from the bodies burned in pits or on pyres was collected in ditches dug for that purpose near the incineration sites, then used as fuel for the fires that burned the bodies. This practice was especially common on rainy days. From time to time, the bodies of new arrivals were thrown into the crematoria with the bodies of emaciated veteran prisoners so that body fat from the healthier new arrivals made the burning process more efficient." Strzelecki, "The Plunder of Victims and Their Corpses," in Yisrael Gutman and Michael Berenbaum, eds., *Anatomy of the Auschwitz Death Camp* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press; Washington, DC: US Holocaust Memorial Museum, 1994), pp. 261–2.

29. To my knowledge it is mentioned just once: Gieseke and Markert's brief 1996 discussion (*Flieger, Filz, und Vaterland*, p. 63), however, is tucked into the margins of a still untranslated book that has been largely ignored by mainstream Beuys scholarship. Other than my 1997 Ph.D. dissertation, of which this chapter is a summary, there has been no discussion of the hair-felt link in the published English language reception.

30. Strzelecki, "Plunder of the Victims," pp. 259–61. Copies of numerous SS documents reporting the quantities, destinations and uses are on display in Block 4, Room 5 of the Auschwitz–Birkenau State Museum. SS instructions and directives to the camps, dating from 1942 to 1943, have been published as Nuremberg documents 511-USSR and 3680-PS. A 1943 report of quantities shipped from Auschwitz has been published as Nuremberg document 1257 and trans. in John Mendelsohn, ed., *The Holocaust: Selected Documents in Eighteen Volumes*, vol. 12 (New York: Garland, 1982), pp. 197–200. I thank Steven Luckert for his timely help, in 1997, with these source materials.

31. Beuys himself came very near to fingering this link in a 1970 interview with Bernd Klüser and Jörg Schellmann. Asked why he works mainly with "anomalous, gray materials," Beuys launched into a defensive discussion of the

colorlessness of felt, in the course of which he made an unprompted, albeit vague, reference to the Nazi genocide: "People are very short-sighted when they argue that way, when they say: Beuys makes everything with felt, he's trying to say something about the concentration camps. Nobody bothers to ask whether I might not be more interested in evoking a very colorful anti-image [*Gegenbild*] inside people with the help of this element, felt." Jörg Schellmann, ed., *Joseph Beuys Multiples: Catalogue Raisonné of Multiples and Prints, 1965–1985* (Munich: Edition Schellmann, 1985) and now in English as *Joseph Beuys: The Multiples* (Cambridge, MA: Busch-Reisinger Museum/Harvard University; Minneapolis: Walker Art Center; Munich: Edition Schellmann, 1997), p.11. As suggestive as this utterance is, one must conclude from the context that Beuys refers to the lack of color and hope associated with the camps, rather than the link of hair.

32. *Mein und meiner Lieben verlassener Schlaf*, in Eva Beuys, et al., eds., *Joseph Beuys Block Beuys*, pp. 90–1; and pl. 74 in Schirmer, ed., *Essential Joseph Beuys.*

33. In Block 5 of the Auschwitz–Birkenau State Museum.

34. In the 1970 interview Klüser and Schellmann cited earlier, Beuys scornfully evaded direct questions about the resemblance between the *Felt Suits* and "convicts' " uniforms. Whatever else the suits may denote, the evasion was far from successful. Schellmann, ed., *Joseph Beuys: The Multiples*, p. 16.

35. The Soviets filmed the room of hair to use as evidence in the coming war crimes trials. The SS did not, in this case, have time to destroy the hair, which was ready for shipment to factories. An enlargement of a still image from the film footage can be seen in Room 5, Block 4.

36. Fabrice Hergott counts 284 in the Paris installation (Hergott and Hohlfeldt, eds., *Joseph Beuys*, p. 233). Anthony d'Offay, in whose London gallery the piece was first installed, writes that 43 groups of 7 columns were used, which would have put the total number of columns at 301. *Joseph Beuys: Ideas and Actions*, Exhibition catalog (New York: Hirsch & Adler Modern, 1988), pp. 104–05.

37. The silencing of music, from early objects recalling broken phonographs to the felt-wrapped pianos and cellos, constitutes a line of its own within Beuys's oeuvre. That line, which leads directly to *Plight*, would have to be seen as belonging to, at least in its beginnings, the intense response to John Cage initiated by the international artists of Fluxus.

38. See e.g., Hergott and Hohlfeldt, eds., *Joseph Beuys*, p. 345.

39. From 1969, now in Kassel, pl. 107 in Schirmer, ed., *Essential Joseph Beuys*. A single example of the sled-pack is in Vitrine 8, Room 7, in Darmstadt, strikingly juxtaposed to an object group titled *Bathtub*, 1961, and consisting of a small tub with electric immersion coil and a large fist of fat on a sheet of felt. Eva Beuys et al., eds., *Joseph Beuys Block Beuys*, pp. 266–7.

40. Now in a private collection, but reproduced in Eva Beuys et al., eds., *Joseph Beuys Block Beuys*, p. 357. The same assemblage, cast in bronze and combined with a small tub-form and an electric immersion coil, becomes the 1984 bronze *Bathtub for a Heroine*; see *Joseph Beuys Block Beuys*, p. 387; and pl. 20/cat. 55 in Zweite, *Joseph Beuys: Natur Materie Form.*

41. Plate 198/cat. 392 in Zweite, *Joseph Beuys: Natur Materie Form.*

42. Plate 130 in Schirmer, ed., *Essential Joseph Beuys*. It must be said that Kim Levin, in a line tucked into her review of the 1979/80 Guggenheim retrospective, hit

the nail right on the head: "Besides the purely autobiographical childhood memories mentioned in the catalog, *Tram Stop*—with a head protruding from the end of the cannon—suggests the end of the line at the concentration camps." Indeed. Levin, "Joseph Beuys: The New Order," p. 176. Cf. Tisdall, *Joseph Beuys*, pp. 242–7; and Rieja Brouns, *Joseph Beuys: Strassenbahnhaltestelle* (Otterlo: Kröller-Müller Museum, 1994).

43. Now in Room 3 of the Beuys Block in Darmstadt. See Eva Beuys et al., eds., *Joseph Beuys Block Beuys*, pp. 106–07.

44. Now in Vitrine 4, Room 7 in Darmstadt. Ibid., pp. 256–9.

45. *Torso*, dated 1949–51, discussed as fig. 2 in Pamela Kort, *Lehmbruck/Beuys* (Cologne: Michael Werner, 1997), n.p.

46. Pls 144 and 145 in Schirmer, ed., *Essential Joseph Beuys*.

47. Of the four versions, one is in Frankfurt, another in Philadelphia. See Mark Rosenthal, *Blitzschlag mit Lichtschein auf Hirsch* (Frankfurt/Main: Museum für Moderne Kunst, 1990), p. 32.

48. In Berlin, Düsseldorf, London, and Munich.

49. In "seinem positiven Gegenbild," in the original German Ms. Transcription, translated as "une contre-image positive." Max Reithmann, *Joseph Beuys: Par la présente, je n'appartiens plus à l'art* (Paris: L'Arche, 1982), pp. 121–2. This is the place for a special thanks to Max Reithmann, whose helpful suggestions and ongoing meditations on Beuys have been invaluable to me.

50. "Also insofern ist diese Auschwitzvitrine eigentlich ein Spielzeug." Translated as: "C'est porquoi 'la vitrine d'Auschwitz' n'est en réalité qu'un jouet." Ibid., p. 122.

51. Tisdall, *Joseph Beuys*, pp. 21–3.

52. "Joseph Beuys," in *Penthouse* 106 (1980), p. 98; and cited by Kramer, *Deutschlandbilder*, p. 261.

53. Kramer, in *Deutschlandbilder*, pp. 262, 269. While the trial and execution of Otto Adolf Eichmann in Jerusalem (1960–62) were closely watched and widely reported, the Frankfurt trials forced a public confrontation with the Nazi genocide on an almost daily basis in Germany itself.

54. The basic elements of this thesis were advanced by Adorno in 1959, in WTP. The thesis was developed and elaborated along more technically Freudian lines by Alexander and Margarete Mitscherlich, *Die Unfähigkeit zu trauern, Grundlagen kollektiven Verhaltens* (Munich: Piper Verlag, 1967); in English as *The Inability to Mourn: Principles of Collective Behavior*, B. Placzek, trans. (New York: Grove Press, 1975).

55. Slavoj Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (London: Verso, 1989), pp. 87–128.

56. Here I am happy to acknowledge and thank Ursula Tax, whose critical comments and readings have greatly sharpened my appreciation for the complexities of the conditions of mourning, especially the generational and transnational factors.

57. See Buchloh, "Reconsidering Joseph Beuys: Once Again," in Ray, ed., *Joseph Beuys: Mapping the Legacy*, pp. 75–89.

58. In an important essay on the Nouveaux Réalistes, Benjamin Buchloh has noted the visual links between Resnais's *Nuit et brouillard* and Arman's *accumulations.* But Buchloh strangely discounts what he sees, relegating these links to the category of "interpretative projection." Even as he registers some specific historical referents behind works by Arman and Yves Klein, Buchloh inscribes

their oeuvres within "a larger [capitalist and national] project of social modernization and amnesia." Thus, he is led to overstate the avoidance of history in postwar visual art: "While French, Italian, and German literature seems to offer a multitude of attempts to reflect on the experience of the war and the Holocaust, the repression of historical experience, the silence on the subject of history, is almost total in the works of the visual neo-avantgarde from 1958 to 1968." (Buchloh, "From Yves Klein's *Le Vide* to Arman's *Le Plein*," in *Neo-Avantgarde and Culture Industry*, pp. 274, 259–60, and 261–2, respectively.) While it is certainly true that the officially approved and institutionally supported art of these years did tend to avoid a deep confrontation with World War II and the Nazi genocide, there was a great deal of visual art that did not. One would only need to point to the Gutai Art Association in Japan (slightly earlier, from 1954 to 1957), the Nouveaux Réalistes in Paris, Beuys and Wolf Vostell in Germany, and Boris Lurie and the March Group in New York, to say nothing of the Situationist International and Fluxus, to be reminded that in the visual arts too, we find a "multitude of attempts" to process history. It seems to me preferable and necessary to read the emergence of performativity and negative presentation in the visual arts as two broad and internationally disseminated responses to the trauma of the war. That these were both strategies of indirection, can be accounted for with reference to the theoretical formulations of the extreme difficulties, not to say impossibility, of representing Auschwitz and Hiroshima by traditional artistic means that emerged in the same period. A difficult task for postwar art history would be to precisely locate the works in which first, largely unconscious responses to history—visible in the increasing devaluation of the object in favor of performativity (in for example Shōzō Shimamoto's and Lucio Fontana's perforation of the canvas in the late 1940s) and in early instances of negative presentation that are without historically specific references (such as Robert Rauschenberg and Susan Weil's 1949 blueprints)—become fully conscious. Clearly this point of consciousness had been reached in Arman's *accumulations* and Klein's negative *anthropometries*, such as the 1961 *Hiroshima*.

59. See Peter Weiss, *The Investigation*, Jon Swan and Ulu Grosbard, trans. (New York: Atheneum, 1966), pp. 257 and 259.

Chapter Three   Ground Zero: Hiroshima Haunts "9/11"

1. The first use of the term by the *NY Times* was in a photo caption ("Ground zero: the skeleton of the World Trade Center"). In the following days, the term spread quickly to reports and commentaries. *NY Times*, September 16, 2001.
2. *Oxford English Dictionary*, 2nd edn, vol. 6 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), pp. 879–80. The *OED* cites Hanson W. Baldwin, "Atom Bomb Is Proved Most Terrible Weapon," *NY Times*, July 7, 1946.
3. *NY Times*, March 13, 2002.
4. See J. Samuel Walker, "The Decision to Use the Bomb: A Historiographical Update," in Michael J. Hogan, ed., *Hiroshima in History and Memory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 11–37.
5. See Barton J. Bernstein, "Understanding the Atomic Bomb and the Japanese Surrender: Missed Opportunities, Little-Known near Disasters, and Modern

Memory," in *Hiroshima in History and Memory*, pp. 38–79; as well as Gar Alperovitz, "Historians Reassess: Did We Need to drop the Bomb?" in Kai Bird and Lawrence Lifschultz, eds., *Hiroshima's Shadow: Writings on the Denial of History and the Smithsonian Controversy* (Stony Creek, CT: Pamphleteer's Press, 1998), pp. 5–21.

6. See William Lanouette, "Three Attempts to Stop the Bomb," in *Hiroshima's Shadow*, pp. 99–118.

7. See John Dower, "The Bombed: Hiroshima and Nagasaki in Japanese Memory," in Hogan, ed., *Hiroshima in History and Memory*, pp. 116–42.

8. Hersey's widely disseminated text has long been available in book form as *Hiroshima* (New York: Vintage, 1989). See also Michael Yavenditti, "John Hersey and the American Conscience"; Mary McCarthy, "The 'Hiroshima' *New Yorker*"; and Norman Cousins, "The Literacy of Survival," all in *Hiroshima's Shadow*, pp. 288–306.

9. "Japan's Struggle to End the War," United States Strategic Bombing Survey Report, Washington, DC, 1946, excerpted in *Hiroshima's Shadow*, pp. 501–02.

10. The Stimson essay, largely ghostwritten by McGeorge Bundy, is reprinted in *Hiroshima's Shadow*, pp. 197–210. See also, Barton J. Bernstein's dissection of the text, "Seizing the Contested Terrain of Early Nuclear History" and his related "A Postwar Myth: 500,000 Lives Saved," both in *Hiroshima's Shadow*, pp. 163–96 and 130–4.

11. Paul Boyer, "Exotic Resonances: Hiroshima in American Memory," in Hogan, ed., *Hiroshima in History and Memory*, pp. 149–50. See also Boyer's *Fallout: A Historian Reflects on America's Half-Century Encounter with Nuclear Weapons* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1998), pp. 41–55.

12. Walker, "The Decision to Use the Bomb: A Historiographical Update," in Hogan, ed., *Hiroshima in History and Memory*, pp. 11–37.

13. In Europe the term "revisionist" is associated with those who have tried to relativize Auschwitz or even deny the Nazi genocide altogether; the term expresses their extremist challenge to an ostensible consensus among European intellectuals about the need for perpetual and self-critical remembrance as an ethical response to Auschwitz. In the United States, however, "revisionist" historians are the ones who have challenged the distortions and selective forgetting of the official American memory of Hiroshima.

14. See Edward T. Linenthal, "Anatomy of a Controversy"; and Richard K. Kohn, "History at Risk: The Case of the *Enola Gay*," both in Edward T. Linenthal and Tom Engelhardt, eds., *History Wars: The Enola Gay and Other Battles for the American Past* (New York: Henry Holt, 1996), pp. 9–62 and 140–70.

15. Robert Jay Lifton and Greg Mitchell, *Hiroshima in America: A Half-Century of Denial* (New York: Avon, 1995), pp. 307–13.

16. *The Nation*, November 26, 2001, p. 7.

17. Herold concludes that from October 7 through to the end of March 2002, "3,000–3,400 civilians" were killed by U.S. bombs. His report, "A Dossier on Civilian Victims of United States Aerial Bombing of Afghanistan: A Comprehensive Accounting," is reprinted at <www.cursor.org>. See also, Barry Bearak, "Unknown Toll in the Fog of War: Civilian Deaths in Afghanistan," *NY Times*, February 10, 2001.

18. Christopher Hitchens, *The Trial of Henry Kissinger* (London: Verso, 2001).

19. Richard Minear, "Atomic Holocaust, Nazi Holocaust: Some Reflections," *Diplomatic History* 19 (Spring 1995): 347–65.

Chapter Four   Mirroring Evil: Auschwitz, Art and the "War on Terror"

1. "Mirroring Evil: Nazi Imagery/Recent Art," at the Jewish Museum, New York, March 17 to June 30, 2002. The artists included were Boaz Arad (Israel), Christine Borland (Scotland), Mat Collishaw (England), Rudolf Herz (Germany), Elke Krystufek (Austria), Mischa Kuball (Germany), Zbigniew Libera (Poland), Roee Rosen (Israel), Tom Sachs (United States), Alan Schechner (England), Alain Séchas (France), Maciej Toporowicz (Poland), and Piotr Uklanski (Poland).

2. Norman L. Kleeblatt, ed., *Mirroring Evil: Nazi Imagery/Recent Art* (New York: Jewish Museum; New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2001), with texts by James E. Young, Norman L. Kleeblatt, Sidra DeKoven Ezrahi, Ellen Handler Spitz, Lisa Saltzman, Ernst van Alphen, Reesa Greenberg, and Joanna Lindenbaum.

3. Edward Rothstein, "Artists Seeking Their Inner Nazi," *NY Times*, February 2, 2002; Barbara Stewart, "Jewish Museum's Exhibition To Include a Warning Label," *NY Times*, March 2, 2002; Jack Hitt, "America's Problem With Modern Art," *NY Times*, March 17, 2002; Sarah Kershaw, "Exhibition With Nazi Imagery Opens Quietly at Jewish Museum," *NY Times*, March 18, 2002; "The Art of Banality" (Editorial), *NY Times*, March 22, 2002; Deborah Solomon, "Designer Death Camp: Questions for Tom Sachs," *NY Times Magazine*, March 10, 2002; Walter Reich, "Appropriating the Holocaust" (Op-Ed), *NY Times*, March 15, 2002; Michael Kimmelman, "Evil, the Nazis and Shock Value," *NY Times*, March 15, 2002. See also, Jewish Museum director Joan Rosenbaum's letter to the editor, protesting the newspaper's treatment of the exhibition, published on March 22, 2002.

4. Hilton Kramer, "Jewish Museum Show Full of Vile Crap, Not to Be Forgiven," *New York Observer*, April 1, 2002.

5. Peter Schjeldahl, "The Hitler Show," *The New Yorker*, April 1, 2002, p. 87.

6. Barbara Pollack, "Mirroring Evil," *Art News* (May 2002), p. 165.

7. Linda Nochlin, " 'Mirroring Evil: Nazi Imagery/Recent Art'," *Artforum* (Summer 2002), pp. 167–8, 207.

8. Eleanor Heartney, "Out of the Bunker," *Art in America* (July 2002), pp. 43–9.

9. Olav Westphalen, "Veiled Controversy," *Parkett 65* (2002), pp. 178–85. Westphalen is presumably referring to John Cage's epigraph to his 1973 book *M*, an implicit critique of American moral exceptionalism registered in the context of Vietnam that is indeed worth rereading today: "To us and all those who hate us, that the U.S.A. may become just another part of the world, no more, no less. (1967, repeated 1973)" Cage, *M: Writings '67–'72* (Middletown Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 1973).

10. Theodor W. Adorno, "Engagement," in Rolf Tiedemann, ed., *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 11 (Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1986); p. 422; in English as "Commitment," in Shierry Weber Nicholsen, trans., *Notes to Literature*, vol. 2 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992), p. 87, translation modified.

11. Theodor W. Adorno, "Engagement," p. 423/88, translation modified.
12. Ibid.
13. Ibid.
14. James E. Young, *At Memory's Edge: After-Images of the Holocaust in Contemporary Art and Architecture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), pp. 1–11.
15. James E. Young, "Forward: Looking into the Mirrors of Evil," in Kleeblatt, ed., *Mirroring Evil*, p. xvii.
16. Deborah Solomon, "Designer Death Camp: Questions for Tom Sachs," *NY Times Magazine*, March 10, 2002, p. 19: "It's a pop-up death camp. It's a sort of best-of-all-worlds composite, with the famous Gate of Death and Crematorium IV from Auschwitz. I made it entirely from a Prada hatbox . . . I'm using the iconography of the Holocaust to bring attention to fashion. Fashion, like fascism, is about a loss of identity. Fashion is good when it helps you to look sexy, but it's bad when it makes you feel stupid or fat because you don't have a Gucci dog bowl and your best friend has one."
17. Joan Rosenbaum, "Director's Preface," in Kleeblatt, ed., *Mirroring Evil*, p. vii.
18. Norman G. Finkelstein, *The Holocaust Industry: Reflections on the Exploitation of Jewish Suffering* (London: Verso, 2000). For Finkelstein's account of the comparative international reception of his *The Holocaust Industry*, see his foreword to the 2001 edition.
19. On Sharon's policy, as carried out by the Israeli Defense Force in the Occupied Territories, see Stephen Graham, "Lessons in Urbicide," *New Left Review* 19 (January/February 2003), pp. 63–77.
20. For a discussion of the charge of anti-Semitism and its relation to the political climate contemporaneous with the "Mirroring Evil" controversy, see Alexander Cockburn, "Israel and 'Anti-Semitism'," *The Nation*, June 3, 2002, p. 8.
21. Sidra DeKoven Ezrahi, "Acts of Impersonation: Barbaric Spaces as Theater," in Kleeblatt, ed., *Mirroring Evil*, pp. 17–38.
22. Cited in Joanna Lindenbaum, "Impersonating the Victim: Consorting with History," in Kleeblatt, ed., *Mirroring Evil*, p. 115.
23. Edward Said, "America's Last Taboo," *New Left Review* 6 (November/December 2000), pp. 45–53.
24. Michael Massing, "The Israel Lobby," *The Nation*, June 10, 2002, pp. 6, 24.

Chapter Five   Little Glass House of Horrors: Taking Damien Hirst Seriously

1. Holger Liebs, "Die Kunst des Terrors," *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, September 12, 2002. On Hirst's retraction, see <www.bbc.co.uk>.
2. "Blast to Freeze: British Art in the Twentieth Century," Kunstmuseum Wolfsburg, September 14, 2002 to January 19, 2003. Catalog: Henry Meyric Hughes and Gijs van Tuyl, eds., *Blast to Freeze: British Art in the Twentieth Century* (Wolfsburg: Kunstmuseum Wolfsburg and Hatja Cantz, 2002).
3. Julian Stallabrass, *High Art Lite: British Art in the 1990s* (London: Verso, 1999), hereafter cited by page number in the text. See also the essays in Stallabrass, Duncan McCorquodale, and Naomi Siderfin, eds., *Occupational Hazard: Critical Writing on Recent British Art* (London: Black Dog Publishing, 1998).

4. Theodor W. Adorno, Letter to Walter Benjamin, March 18, 1936, in Ernst Bloch et al., *Aesthetics and Politics*, translation Ronald Taylor, translation ed. (London: Verso, 1980), p. 123. In the letter, Adorno criticizes Benjamin's essay "The Artwork in the Age of its Technical Reproducibility." Adorno elaborated his notion of the "culture industry" largely in opposition to Benjamin's attempts, following Brecht, to read a different political force in the technological reduction of the autonomy and prestige of traditional bourgeois art. These debates were subtler than their constant and obligatory invocations in critical writing today generally indicate, however. For example, Brecht and Peter Suhrkamp's 1930 notes to *The Rise and Fall of the City of Mahogany* already contained in kernel a theory of the culture industry: "Values evolve which are based on the fodder principle." Brecht, "The Modern Theater is the Epic Theater," in John Willet, ed. and trans., *Brecht on Theater*: *The Development of an Aesthetic*. (New York: Hill and Wang, 1999), p. 34.

5. Adorno, "On the Fetish-Character in Music and the Regression of Listening," in Andrew Arato and Eike Gebhardt, eds., *The Essential Frankfurt School Reader* (New York: Continuum, 1993), p. 275. For readers teethed on the debates about artistic postmodernism that raged in New York through the 1980s, similar arguments made by Clement Greenberg may be more familiar. See his 1939 essay "Avant-Garde and Kitsch," first published in *Partisan Review*, as well as T. J. Clark's cogent critical reading of it, both in Francis Frascina, ed., *Pollock and After: The Critical Debate*, 2nd edn (London: Routledge, 2000). Greenberg, whose critical writings on abstract expressionism have of course been at the center of bitter debates over the history and logic of modernism as well as of the cultural politics of the high/low divide, does seem, at least in his early Marxist phase, quite close to Adorno in his perception of culture industry. Their theories are not identical, however, and should not be confused. In spite of Greenberg's gestures, at the end of the cited essay, toward a dialectical handling of the relation between art and history, his notion of artistic autonomy remained undialectical and led him to ascribe to (high) culture a value that is placed beyond question and beyond social conflict. Adorno criticizes precisely such a move in his 1951 essay "Cultural Criticism and Society": "The greatest fetish of cultural criticism is the notion of culture as such" (CCS 16/23).

6. Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialektik der Aufklärung: Philosophische Fragmente* (Frankfurt/Main: Fischer Verlag, 1969), pp. 133–4; in English as *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, John Cumming, trans. (New York: Continuum, 1998), pp. 125–6.

7. See also Malcolm Dickson, "Another Year of Alienation: On the Mythology of the Artist-Run Initiative," in Stallabrass et al., eds., *Occupational Hazard*, pp. 80–93.

8. See also Simon Ford, "On the Myth of the Young British Artist," *Occupational Hazard*, pp. 130–41.

9. See, e.g., Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialektik der Aufklärung*, pp. 27–8; *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, pp. 21–2, in which the institution of the division of labor is analyzed as the birth of second nature; and Adorno, ND 381/388: "The social division of labor is respected without reflection, along with the flaw that has since become strikingly clear in the two hundred years since [Kant]: that the sciences organized by a division of labor have usurped an illegitimate monopoly on truth."

10. Herbert Marcuse, "Über den affirmativen Charakter der Kultur" [1937], in *Schriften*, vol. 3 (Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1979); in English as "The Affirmative Character of Culture," in Jeremy J. Shapiro, trans., *Negations: Essays in Critical Theory* (Boston: Beacon, 1968).

11. Habermas, following Max Weber, has defined cultural modernism as the emergence of science, law, and art as autonomous spheres, each with their own kind of rationality. This scheme may already grant too much to the division of labor. See Habermas, "Modernity—An Incomplete Project," in Hal Foster, ed., *The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays on Postmodern Culture* (Seattle: Bay Press, 1983), pp. 8–10.

12. Stallabrass is drawing on and responding to attempts by Dave Beech and John Roberts to articulate a high theoretical defense of the new art by means of the category of the "philistine." Cf. Roberts's account of the theoretical landscape of the 1980s and 1990s in his essay "Pop Art, the Popular and British Art of the 1990s," in Stallabrass et al., eds., *Occupational Hazard*, pp. 52–78.

13. The drawing is reproduced in Damien Hirst and Gordon Burn, *On the Way to Work* (London: Faber and Faber, 2001), p. 129.

14. Ibid., pp. 180–1.

15. Ibid.

16. Ibid., p. 177.

17. Ibid., p. 128.

18. Hirst's exploitation of butterflies approached similar conditions in the 1991 installation *In and Out of Love*, but the process of destruction was not actualized in the gallery, as it is in the piece under discussion. An entry on Hirst in the catalog to "Blast to Freeze" summarizes the main concept of *A Hundred Years* without in any way attempting to confront the problems it raises. The piece is described, correctly if astonishingly, as "a fly hatchery and extermination camp." Hughes and van Tuyl, eds., *Blast to Freeze*, p. 337.

19. Ibid.

20. "Fliegen-Kunst doch Tierquälerei?", *Wolfsburger Allgemeine*, October 24, 2002.

21. In an essay in which the specifics of history are no impediment to a wide-eyed and apolitical boosterism, Loura Wixley Brooks tries to link Hirst and some of his peers to the sublime of Edmund Burke: "The quality of human life has changed a great deal since Burke wrote the *Philosophical Enquiry*, but it is unlikely that basic human nature and perceptual apparatus has. Burke's theory, like many other good theories, has stood the test of time, and whether he is aware of this or not, Hirst has developed an art in which this type of sublime reaction can be experienced in a variety of constructive, life-affirming and illuminating ways." Loura Wixley Brooks, "Damien Hirst and the Sensibility of Shock," in Paul Crowther, ed., *The Contemporary Sublime: Sensibilities of Transcendence and Shock* (*Art & Design* Profile 40) (London: Academy Group Ltd., 1995), p. 67.

22. Number 130 in Volker Rattemeyer and Renate Petzinger, eds., *Jochen Gerz*, *Performances*, *Installations and Works in Public Space 1968–1999*, *Catalogue Raisonné*, vol. 1 (Nuremberg: Verlag für moderne Kunst Nürnberg and Museum Wiesbaden, 1999), p. 122. See also, Markus Landert, ed., *Miami Islet: Interactive Strategies in the Work of Jochen Gerz* (Thurgau: Kunstmuseum des Kantons Thurgau; Zurich: Niggli Verlag, 2000).

23. Krystufek's mixed media collage, *Economical Love* (*Pussy Control*), from 1998, is reproduced as pl. 6 in Norman L. Kleeblatt, ed., *Mirroring Evil: Nazi Imagery/Recent Art* (New York: Jewish Museum; New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2002).

Chapter Six   Blasted Moments: Remarking a Hiroshima Image

1. I refer to the stunning paradox with which Maurice Blanchot opens *The Writing of the Disaster*, Ann Smock, trans. (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1995), p. 1: "The disaster ruins everything, all the while leaving everything intact."

2. See J. Samuel Walker, "The Decision to Use the Bomb: A Historiographical Update," and Barton J. Bernstein, "Understanding the Atomic Bomb and the Japanese Surrender: Missed Opportunities, Little-Known Near Disasters, and Modern Memory," both in Michael J. Hogan, ed., *Hiroshima in History and Memory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 11–79; and Gar Alperovitz, "Historians Reassess: Did We Need to Drop the Bomb," in Kai Bird and Lawrence Lifschultz, eds., *Hiroshima's Shadow: Writings on the Denial of History and the Smithsonian Controversy* (Sony Creek, CI: Pamphleteer's Press, 1998), pp. 5–21.

3. I am re-inflecting some of the keywords of Benjamin's essay in order to emphasize how historical "truth" is their point of convergence with the post-catastrophe reflections of Adorno and Derrida. "Empty, homogenous time" (*leere und homogene Zeit*) would be reified time, experienced as history purged of revolutionary "events," closed to the possibility of any further rupturing of qualitative "arrivals." Its conception of history would correspond to what Adorno called "the ever-new production of the always-the-same" (CCS 16/23, translation modified). The "Now" (*Jetztzeit*) would be the experience of reactivated revolutionary time, struggling to open itself to its own "weak messianic power" (*schwache messianische Kraft*) and thus to bring about "the real state of emergency" (*der wirkliche Ausnahmezustand*) of militant transformational action. Thus, to say that Hiroshima blasted a moment out of the stream of history is to say, in Benjamin's terms, that the repression and avoidance of the trauma blocked access to the "Now" and reinstated the reified "intactness" and empty homogeneity of continuously elapsing time. To restart ethico-political time would be to blast open that reified continuum. Benjamin's "arrest" (*Stillstellung*) of thought in a "constellation" of historical tensions that "crystallizes into a monad" would not, in my reading, be the seizure of Adorno's dialectical movement into the frozen closure of resolution; it would rather be a moment within the dialectic that "hits" and propels critical thought into committed practice. See also, "Konvolut N" in Benjamin, *Das Passagen-Werk*, in Rolf Tiedemann and Hermann Schweppenhäuser, eds., *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 5 (Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1972); in English as *The Arcades Project*, Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin, trans. (Cambridge, MA: Belknap/Harvard University Press, 1999).

4. Michel Foucault, "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History," in Donald Bouchard, ed., Donald Bouchard and Sherry Simon, trans., *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1977).

5. Benjamin, *Passagen-Werk*, p. 578; *Arcades Project*, pp. 463 and 464, translation modified.

6. Michael Blow et al., *The History of the Atomic Bomb* (New York: American Heritage, 1968), hereafter cited by page number in the text. I thank Joni Spigler for putting a copy of this book into my hands ten years ago, thereby exposing me to this image and its hit.

7. The quotation is from Stimson's essay, "The Decision to Use the Atomic Bomb," published in the February 1947 issue of *Harper's*. This text was part of a major reenactment of the "official story" first publicly formulated by Truman himself. The essay is reprinted in Bird and Lifschultz, eds., *Hiroshima's Shadow*. See also, Barton J. Bernstein's dissection of the text, "Seizing the Contested Terrain of Early Nuclear History," and his related "A Postwar Myth: 500,000 Lives Saved," in the same volume, pp. 163–96 and 130–4.

8. Robert Jay Lifton and Greg Mitchell, *Hiroshima in America: A Half-Century of Denial* (New York: Avon, 1995), p. 16.

9. Ibid., pp. 13–22 and 152–6. The source from which Lifton and Mitchell quote—Laurence's 1946 collection of his journalism under the title *Dawn Over Zero*—is actually recommended to the "junior" readers of the American Heritage volume, under the heading "Further Reading" (p. 149).

10. Dominick LaCapra, *Representing the Holocaust: History, Theory, Trauma* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994), pp. 13–15, 62–3, 91–6, 105–09, 148–9. While I cannot specifically address LaCapra's argument here, I take very seriously his attempts to understand the role of the sublime (or "a" sublime, or something like it) within the Nazi fantasy and to grasp critically how such a role would effect the continuity of the aesthetic category.

11. On this period and its peculiar "splitting" of the atom into symbols of both war and peace, see Paul Boyer, *Fallout: A Historian Reflects on America's Half-Century Encounter with Nuclear Weapons* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1998), pp. 107–28.

12. Frank Barnaby, general ed., et al., *The Gaia Peace Atlas: Survival into the Third Millennium* (New York: Doubleday, 1988).

13. The photomontage was one of many produced by Peter Kennard for the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament in England. It is reproduced in a different configuration in Kennard's *Images for the End of the Century: Photomontage Equations* (London: Journeyman Press, 1990), n.p. There, it is accompanied by the following text: "This is a photograph of a wristwatch. The wristwatch was found in the water, 150 meters downstream from the Motoyasu Bridge in Hiroshima. It shows the exact time of the bombing."

14. Barnaby, ed., *Gaia Peace Atlas*, p. 69.

15. See Walker's "The Decision to Use the Bomb: A Historiographical Update," in Hogan, ed., *Hiroshima in History and Memory*.

16. Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1951); and Eberhard Jäckel, "Die elende Praxis der Untersteller," *Die Zeit*, September 12, 1986. Jäckel's essay is translated and discussed in LaCapra, *Representing the Holocaust*, p. 49, and in Enzo Traverso, *Understanding the Nazi Genocide: Marxism after Auschwitz* (London: Pluto Press, 1999), p. 68.

17. See Traverso, *Understanding the Nazi Genocide*, p. 17 and ch. 4; and LaCapra, *Representing the Holocaust*, ch. 3.
18. Giorgio Agamben, *Remnants of Auschwitz: The Witness and the Archive*, Daniel Heller-Roazen, trans. (New York: Zone, 1999), p. 148. See also, Agamben's *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, Daniel Heller-Roazen, trans. (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998).
19. Jonathan Schell, *The Unfinished Twentieth Century* (London: Verso, 2001), pp. 3–7.
20. Ibid., p. 60. Schell finds more credibility in the 1946 Acheson–Lillienthal plan than I can.

Chapter Seven   Installing a "New Cosmopolitics": Derrida and the Writers

1. The *Carrefour des littératures europénes* is a network of writers and intellectuals concerned with issues of artistic and intellectual autonomy. According the IPW website, the *Carrefour* was founded as a response to the 1989 *fatwa* against Salman Rushdie and meets every year in November. Christian Salmon was its director from 1991 to 1993. On this and on the information about the IPW that follows, see <www.autodafe.org>.
2. At this writing, the IPW has had three presidents: Rushdie (1994–97); Nigerian Nobel laureate Wole Soyinka (1997–2000); and American novelist Russell Banks (2000–present).
3. Christian Salmon, "The Parliament of a 'Missing People'," in *Autodafe* 1 (Fall 2000), and posted at <www.autodafe.org>. Since this essay was written, the IPW has changed its name to "Cities of Asylum," acknowledging the constitutive and enduring centrality of this project.
4. Ibid.
5. *The European Charter of Cities of Asylum* (Strasbourg: CLRAE, May 31, 1995) and posted at <www.autodafe.org>. Among the cited instruments and treaties codifying freedom of expression and the right to asylum were the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the 1951 Geneva Convention on the Status of Refugees, the 1966 International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, and the 1950 European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms. Under the terms of the Charter, member cities are expected to pay a subscription to the IPW (that is then redistributed to participating resident writers in the form of a monthly stipend), to provide lodging to its writer for a year, to facilitate the obtainment of visas and residence permits, and to guarantee the writer access to municipal public services. The IPW works to integrate resident writers into the cultural life of their asylum cities and monitors the program.
6. Jacques Derrida, *Cosmopolites de tous les pays*, *encore un effort*! (Paris: Editions Galilée, 1997); in English as "On Cosmopolitanism," Mark Dooley, trans., in OCF.
7. Mark Dooley translates *villes refuges* as "cities of refuge." Following the IPW itself, which has adopted the English formula "Cities of Asylum" as the name of its network, I have modified Dooley's translation as seems appropriate in this and all other cited passages.

8. Derrida, *Of Hospitality: Anne Dufourmantelle invites Jacques Derrida to respond*, Rachel Bowlby, trans. (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000), p. 77.
9. Ibid.
10. Ibid., p. 27.
11. Ibid., p. 47.
12. Ibid., p. 45.
13. In a different context, Derrida had already indicated a needed extension and diversification of the field of international law under the name of (and call for) a "New International": "a profound transformation, projected over a long term, of international law, of its concepts, and its field of interventions." Derrida, *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning & the New International*, Peggy Kamuf, trans. (New York and London: Routledge, 1994), p. 84. The profound concluding pages of this text (pp. 167–76) already begin to elaborate the relation of urgency between justice and hospitality.
14. See, for example, the "Declaration of Independence" written by Salman Rushdie and adopted as the IPW's "charter," at <www.autodafe.org>.
15. Derrida has since then addressed the issue of intellectual autonomy and has tied his analysis of it into the constellation of his ethico-political concepts. Derrida, "The future of the profession or the university without condition (thanks to the 'Humanities,' what *could take place* tomorrow)," in Tom Cohen, ed., *Jacques Derrida and the Humanities: A Critical Reader* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).
16. See "Palestine: Appeal for Peace," at <www.autodafe.org>.
17. *Le Voyage en Palestine* (Paris: Editions Climate, 2002).

Chapter Eight Working Out and Playing Through: Boaz Arad's Hitler Videos

1. Moshe Zimmerman, "The Collective Memory of the Victimhood: Comments on the Israeli Reception of the Shoa and Its Role in Current Policy," in Tsafrir Cohen, Avi Pitchon, and Mirjam Wenzel, eds., *Wonderyears* (Berlin: Neue Gesellschaft für Bildende Kunst, 2003), p. 35. See also, Idith Zertal's hard-hitting essay "Auschwitz Is Here," pp. 44–58 in the same catalog.
2. Ariella Azoulay, "The Return of the Repressed," in Cohen et al., eds., *Wonderyears*, p. 60.
3. Ibid., p. 65.
4. "Mirroring Evil: Nazi Imagery/Recent Art," at the Jewish Museum, New York, March 17 to June 30, 2002. Catalog: Norman L. Kleeblatt, ed., *Mirroring Evil: Nazi Imagery/Recent Art* (New York: Jewish Museum; New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2001).
5. See chapter four, above.
6. "Wonderyears," at the Neue Gesellschaft für Bildende Kunst (NGBK), Berlin, April 26 to June 1, 2003.
7. Since this chapter was written, two emergent factors have begun to complicate this characterization of the German context. The first is a marked increase in anti-Semitic attacks across Europe, particularly in France. In Germany, such attacks remain the business of neo-Nazi groups like the NPD (National-Democratic Party of Germany), which stubbornly survives as a marginal party—particularly in depressed areas of old East Berlin, such as Köpenick, where the NPD has is

its national headquarters. The second factor is a painful split that has opened up within Germany's radical left. Over the 1990s, following reunification, a configuration of groups and writers emerged from within the post-1968 Antifa (antifascist) milieu. This grouping, the so-called Antideutschen (anti-Germans), has provoked debate through its uncompromising—and within the left contrarian—support for the state of Israel. In their alleged vigilance against all forms of latent German fascism, this anti-German grouping has specifically condemned solidarity with the Palestinians as a flirtation with the irredeemably fascist forces of radical Islam. Since the U.S.-led invasion of Iraq, this sectarian debate has turned especially rancorous. Just as the global left was developing a unified position against the war in Iraq, the anti-Germans energetically polemicized *against* leftist criticism of the U.S. intervention or of Sharon's repression of Gaza and the West Bank. In clashing with the "Antiimps" (anti-imperialists) of the German left—and in particular with that part that sees the Israeli–Palestinian conflict as a central site of imperialist and anti-imperialist struggle—the anti-Germans have managed to perfectly align themselves with the neo-imperialist politics of the US and Israeli states. Quite perversely citing Adorno as an authority for their views, they manage to exert a power of disturbance out of proportion to their relatively tiny numbers by means of provocative formulations and shrewd publicity. (Their main print organ is the magazine *Bahamas*, but they also enjoy editorial influence at the journal *Konkret* and the weekly *Jungle World*.) The latest intensification of this surprising and wastefully destructive split within the German left was only beginning to become visible as "Wonderyears" went on view in Kreuzberg. I vividly remember a 2003 May Day demo made up of Autonomen (anarchist, non-hierarchical) and non-party-affiliated groups from Berlin's large and differentiated radical left; a group of anti-Germans provocatively marched in this demo carrying Israeli flags. For more contextual analysis and a critique of the anti-Germans, see Robert Kurz, *Die antideutsche Ideologie* (Münster: Unrast Verlag, 2003).

8. Azoulay, "Return of the Repressed," p. 69.

9. Ibid., p. 66.

10. Ibid., p. 70.

11. The theory of trauma that Freud advances in the 1920 *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* develops from the insight that repetition is a defensive strategy for retrospectively coping with overpowering experiences. Observing his grandson, aged one and a half, respond to the trauma of his mother's absence, Freud recognizes a compulsion similar to that at work in the repetitive dreams of veterans suffering from traumatic neurosis. Improvising a game with a wooden reel and string, the boy makes the toy disappear (*fort*: "gone"), then brings it back by reeling it in on the string (*da*: "there"). Freud famously interprets the repetitive *fort-da* as the child's belated attempt to master his mother's comings and goings while also revenging himself on her for her betraying absence. Sigmund Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, James Strachey, ed. and trans. (New York: Norton, 1961), pp. 11–17.

12. Azoulay, "Return of the Repressed," p. 67.

13. Joanna Lindenbaum, "The Villain Speaks the Victim's Language," in Kleeblatt, ed., *Mirroring Evil*, p. 121.

14. See Azoulay, "Return of the Repressed," p. 71; and Lindenbaum, "The Villain Speaks," p. 121.

15. Azoulay, "Return of the Repressed," p. 72; and Lindenbaum, "The Villain Speaks," pp. 121–2.

16. Here, I am emphasizing the literal meaning of the German term *Trauerspiel* in order to undermine any rigid, undialectical opposition between the "work" and "play" of mourning. Such oppositions are typically set up by crudely collapsing Freud's distinction between "working-through" (*durcharbeiten*) and "acting-out" (*agieren*) into a hard binary compound that pits the rational, adult, serious, and disciplined against the irrational, infantile, unserious, and uncontrolled— thereby reproducing a logic of purity that all too easily ends up on the side of domination and the renunciation of happiness. (What we need is rigor without the purity, an unpuritanical rigor.) At the same time, I am inflecting literary history's conventionalized use of the term *Trauerspiel* as the name for a specific baroque dramatic form. Walter Benjamin's rejected 1925 *Habilitation* thesis on this seventeenth-century genre—with its themes of revenge, catastrophe, lamentation, and melancholy—contains, in addition to his theory of allegory, the first formulations of the concepts that would be developed and elaborated in greater detail in the famous 1940 essay on history. Without of course suggesting that this historical genre can or should be resurrected as an adequate form for a cultural response to Nazi genocide or its displaced aftermaths, I intentionally evoke Benjamin and this constellation here as a way of obliquely criticizing the so-called tragic intractability of the cyclical violence in Israel and the Occupied Territories. Benjamin, in any case, remains an unavoidable reference in any critical reflection on the relations between art, fascism, and traumatic history. Benjamin, *Ursprung des deutschen Trauerspiels* (Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1963); in English as *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, John Osborne, trans. (New York: Verso, 1998).

17. Theodor W. Adorno, "Ist die Kunst heiter?" in *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 11, p. 603; in English as "Is Art Lighthearted?" in Shierry Weber Nicholsen, trans., *Notes to Literature*, vol. 2 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), p. 251, translation modified; and hereafter cited in the text by page number of the German, then the English editions.

Chapter Nine   Listening with the Third Ear: Echoes from Ground Zero

1. This chapter was originally published in *Dissent* (Fall 2003): 81–4. See also, Mitchell Cohen's response, pp. 85–6 in the same issue.

2. Mitchell Cohen, "Editor's Page," *Dissent* (Winter 2003).

Chapter Ten   Conditioning Adorno: "After Auschwitz" Now

1. This chapter was presented at the Society of European Philosophy 2003 Annual Conference at the University of Essex on September 11, 2003.

2. Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus logico-philosophicus/Logisch-philosophische Abhandlung* [1921] (Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1963), p. 115.

3. In 1966, the same year that *Negative Dialectics* was published in Frankfurt, Heidegger broke his 20-year silence and granted an interview to Rudolph

Augstein, the publisher of *Der Spiegel*—but only on the condition that it would not be published until after his death. The infamous "Only a God Can Save Us" interview (*Der Spiegel*, May 31, 1976), is in English, Maria P. Alter and John D. Caputo, trans., in Richard Wolin, ed., *The Heidegger Controversy: A Critical Reader* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1993).

4. This is the wording of the 1962 essay "Engagement," in Rolf Tiedemann, ed., *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 11 (Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1975), p. 422; "Commitment," in Shierry Weber Nicholsen, trans., *Notes to Literature,* vol. 2 (New York: Columbia Press, 1992), p. 87, translation modified. Here Adorno is quoting his own, slightly different, 1951 formulation in CCS 30/34.

5. Adorno, "Ist Kunst Heiter?" in *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 11, p. 603; "Is Art Lighthearted?" in *Notes to Literature*, vol. 2, p. 251, translation modified. Shierry Weber Nicholsen sensibly translates "ins Unabsehbare" in context as "for the foreseeable future." But in an essay in which Adorno legibly struggles to hold himself open to the mutational force of contemporary artistic practices, I suspect that the burden of this counterintuitive construction is to register the conflict between Adorno's cultural pessimism and his dialectical commitment to avoid analytically foreclosing the possibility of the rupturing qualitative "event" that would lead out of perennial catastrophe. See MM 476/245.

6. Adorno, "Engagement," p. 423; "Commitment," p. 88.

7. "Mirroring Evil: Nazi Imagery/Recent Art," at the Jewish Museum, New York, March 17 to June 30, 2002.

8. See Norman G. Finkelstein, *The Holocaust Industry: Reflections on the Exploitation of Jewish Suffering* (London: Verso, 2000). Zertal's and Zimmermann's major works are still untranslated into English, but see the following summary essays: Idith Zertal, "Auschwitz Is Here," and Moshe Zimmermann, "The Collective Memory of the Victimhood: Comments on the Israeli Reception of the Shoa and its Role in Current Policy," both in Tsafrir Cohen, Avi Pitchon, and Mirjam Wenzel, eds., *Wonderyears* (Berlin: Neue Gesellschaft für Bildende Kunst, 2003). See also, Gabriel Piterberg's review of Zertal's 2002 *Ha-Ummah ve ha-Mavet: Historia, Zikkaron, Politika* [Death and the Nation: History, Memory, Politics], "Hannah Arendt in Tel Aviv," *New Left Review* 21 (May/June 2003), pp. 137–46.

9. See Immanuel Wallerstein, "The Eagle Has Crash Landed," *Foreign Policy* (July/August 2002), pp. 60–8; "Revolts Against the System," *New Left Review* 18 (November/December 2002), pp. 29–39; and "Entering Global Anarchy," *New Left Review* 22 (July/August 2003), pp. 27–35.

10. The color page spreads are classified on the journal contents page as a "Project" and are accompanied by a short text by Attie. Editor Patricia Phillips justifies this arrangement, within a theme issue on "Photography and the Paranormal," with the observation that Attie's images "linger in our consciousness." Shimon Attie, "The Writing on the Wall, Berlin, 1992–1993: Projections in Berlin's Jewish Quarter," *Art Journal* 62 (Fall 2003), pp. 74–83. Phillips's comment is on p. 3.

11. The challenge would then be to avoid utterly collapsing politics into that rigid friend/enemy binary logic elaborated by the Nazi legal theorist Carl Schmitt. The enemy must rather be thought of at the level of a system—as the barbarous relations globally structuring perennial suffering. See also my note 2 to the introduction, above.

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